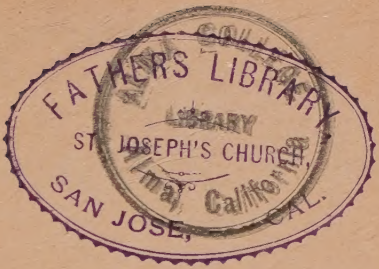

SPIRITUAL LETTERS

OF

FATHER SURIN, S.J

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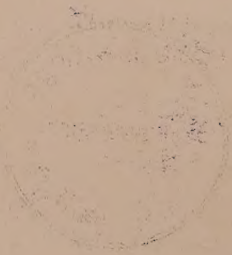

SPIRITUAL LETTERS

OF

FATHER SURIN. S.J.

Translated by

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With a Preface by

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PREFACE.

Few lives among those of the cluster of saints that glorify the Church's firmament, are more wonderful than the story of Father Surin.

The exquisite beauty of his soul shines out in the memoir written of him by the Venerable Archdeacon of Evreux, —M. Boudon, in his "L'Homme de Dieu;"—and still more in the many works the Father has left behind. The holiness therein revealed disarms criticism, and explains, to any who admit the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the marvels of his sufferings and humiliation.

Some knowledge of his life in turn lights up his writings. We feel, when we know more of the man, how thoroughly

his words are no studied beauties, but the overflowings of a heart that had drunk deep of the double stream that flows from the Sacred and pierced Heart of our Lord, —the bitter waters of suffering, and the sweet wine of love. They are what he had suffered, what he had done, transferred to paper for our lesson.

At the commencement of the 17th century, in 1600, or 1601, in the city of Bordeaux, when peace was at last reigning in France, John Joseph Surin was born. His family was of the *noblesse de la robe*, and many of his ancestors and relatives had held, like his father, high positions in the Provincial Parlements. God drew the child to Himself at the first dawn of reason; and when but eight years old he made a vow of chastity, which he kept faithfully to his dying day. Besides giving him a holy mother, He brought him under the influence of another saintly soul, who was to have a great influence upon the cast of his future holiness. When but ten or eleven, he met one of the

first companions of St. Theresa, who had come to found a Convent of Carmelite Nuns at Bordeaux. The conversation of the boy made such an impression on her, that she was convinced that he was a child of election, and she took pains to teach him St. Theresa's method of prayer.

From that time his holidays were spent between the Carmelite Convent and the House of Noviciate of the Jesuit Fathers. Surin owns to great and signal graces received when but a boy; and once, when about thirteen, assisting on his knees at the Nuns' Vespers, such a flood of spiritual joy came down into his soul, that his frail body almost sunk beneath it, and he was forced to sit down to avoid fainting. Our Blessed Lord made him aware that He had chosen him in a special way to be the object of His affections. The love which these favours enkindled in him for His Divine Master, naturally turned his thoughts towards a life of perfection. The new reform of Mount Carmel, to whose holy Foundress he had such devo-

tion, attracted him by its spirit of prayer. But his zeal for souls made him at last turn to another Order, where he could satisfy at once both these cravings of his heart. His father had been so good a friend to the Jesuit College at Bordeaux, that his portrait was to be seen in the Great Hall, among the number of their special benefactors. But John Joseph was an only son, and clear and manifest as was his call to the Society of Jesus, he had to struggle long and hard before he could gain his father's consent.

On our Lady's Visitation, 1615, at last his wish was granted, just about the very time B. John Berchmans began to attend the classes of the College of the Society at Mechlin, in the year before his noviciate.

The hidden life of protracted torture and ignominy is still hidden; the brief but perfect life of joyous youth is made manifest to the whole Church, by the beatification of B. John.

When Surin had taken his vows, in 1517, the young Religious was sent to his

studies of philosophy and theology at the well-known College of La Flèche in Anjou; and, when these were completed, to the "Schola affectûs," the last finishing process in a Jesuit's life, the third year of probation. He passed it at Rouen, under no less a guide that Père Lallemant. That saintly director fully appreciated the holiness of his pupil, and encouraged him in the idea of dying most absolutely to all earthly things, an idea which he carried out entirely and perfectly. "We must be dead to all things, great and little, and fix all our attention on God. Every creature is a snare to hinder us from loving God with our whole heart."

When the year was over, he met in the diligence going to Paris, a young man, son of a baker of Rouen, and who had been a servant in the Friary of St. Anthony, in that city. He was on his way to the capital, there to join the Franciscan Order, as lay-brother.

Father Surin found in this simple soul such marvellous treasures of divine grace.

that he thought at first his companion was an Angel, concealed under a human form. So apt a scholar profited by the words of this saintly postulant, and owned that his heart burned within him as he went on his way.

The sanctity of Father Surin did not long lie hid, and shortly after his return to his province of Aquitaine, Father Auginot, who had been entrusted with the duty of opening a house of third probation at Marennes, asked to have him to assist, by his example and by his counsel, in the important duty of training the young priests of the Society.

He was himself then below the age of most of those whom he had to guide, being not thirty years of age.

So complete was the mastery he possessed over himself, that during his stay in that house, he never deliberately did anything to gratify his self-love.

He practised the most rigorous penance, which even his sufferings did not make him abate. His maxim was that too great

a care of health was a delusion, and that until we are bold to try, we do not know the amount of strength we possess.

He had the greatest horror of worldly wisdom, and worldly manners, as ill-suiting one who, by profession, is an imitator of the simplicity and folly of Bethlehem. The same motive made him, like St. Ignatius, thoroughly embrace the ignominy of the Cross. So pure was his love, that, while thoroughly detached from all earthly ties, he cherished a special love towards those who hated him, for, he said, he could embrace them purely for the love of God.

He had a special predilection for two classes of souls; souls far advanced in perfection, and sinners.

So ardent was his love of the Blessed Sacrament, that he begged, when at Marennes, and afterwards at Bordeaux, to be allowed to occupy a little room near the chapel, and as soon as all were retired to rest, would go before the Tabernacle, and give free scope to his affection, when

he thought none were near, in sighs and exclamations of love.

As we read of St. Catharine of Sienna, our Blessed Lord seems to have honoured this faithful imitation of Himself by allowing His servant to take even His outward shape and appearance. And this visible sign of union only foreshadowed the mysterious union which our Blessed Lord effected, when, one night, the Eve of the Ascension, Father Surin was awakened from his sleep, and he saw Jesus Christ descend into his room, and unite Himself to him in a way so wonderful, that after that, he used to see his Lord living within him, as though another self; and felt this sacred presence by marvellous impressions, now of His holy childhood, now of His infinite greatness, now of His awful sufferings.

Next to Jesus, Mary had the first place in his heart, and her image, which he had stamped on his thoughts, was the shrine before which he knelt, the altar to which he clung in the terrible conflicts with

Satan in which he was afterwards engaged. He kissed with affectionate simplicity her pictures, saying, as he did so: "Ma chère, ma chère, ma bonne mère. My dear, my dear, my good Mother." The holy angels had a large share in his devotion, and in return, he constantly received great favours at their hands, and his Guardian Angel frequently made him aware of his presence.

His love of poverty caused him to choose the glorious patriarch of Assisi as a special patron;—in his room he would have neither prie-dieu, nor table, but only a little stool,—and, like St. Francis, he cherished great affection for his brethren, the poor.

Obedience was necessarily his virtue, and he always looked upon it as his safeguard in the perils he had to encounter. The unfortunate L'Abadie, who had entered the Society in 1610, was sent to Père Surin to be under his direction; but the Father soon saw beneath great gifts, natural and supernatural, there lay a terri-

ble stratum of unsubdued pride. In vain he urged upon him the necessity of thorough submission to the visible authority of the certain vice-gerents of God, Abadie answered, that was all very well for others, and he grew indignant at the very suggestion of possible deception in the visions which he beheld. The holy man's efforts were fruitless. A dispensation from his Religious vows once procured, he became a popular preacher, and then,—to verify the foresight of Father Surin,—abandoned his religion, and not only became himself a Calvinist, but drew many after him into error.

Father Surin had been preaching on the feast of the Apostle of the Indies, St. Francis Xavier, 1634, when, inspired, no doubt, by that Saint's devotion, he was moved to offer himself to go wherever God might choose to send him. The answer of his prayer came at once, for just then his superior entered his room, bringing the Provincial's letter, with orders for him to go to Loudun, to exorcise the Ursulines

of that town. It would be quite beside the object, and beyond the limits of a short memoir, to go into the history of these extraordinary facts. Those who would throw discredit on them, are either disbelievers in revelation, who deny the same facts in the four Gospels; or historical sceptics, who would have to establish a charge of the vilest perjury, not only against all the Nuns, but against Father Surin himself. How far personal and state motives may have weighed in the cruel death of Grandier, who was charged with having caused the possession of these nuns by magical arts, is also beside the main question. The fact of the possession cannot be doubted, when one reads our author's own letters, describing his own state and sufferings. Grandier was executed on August 18th, 1634, and, as we have said, it was only in December Father Surin was sent to undo the work attributed to that unhappy man. The humble Religious urged every motive against the office entrusted to him; but

no sooner was a positive order given, than he went at once, and with such speed, that though, at the request of his advisers, the Provincial sent a second letter, countermanding the first, he was gone before it arrived.

God rewarded his prompt obedience, by restoring instantaneously the strength of his body, wasted by his continual and unrelenting austerities.

He attributed to St. Joseph, towards whom he cherished a special devotion, the discovery that the Prioress, Mother Jane of the Angels, was possessed. The demon of pride, which had entered into her, filled her with an aversion for the Father, and a great horror of disclosing to him the terrible state into which she felt she had fallen. As but rarely possession is unaccompanied with some fault on the part of the sufferer, like a prudent physician he laboured diligently and fearlessly to remove from the poor Nun any slight defects that gave the demon a hold upon her. God supported him in his toilsome labour by signal graces.

The evening, while reciting the night litanies with his little community, God struck his heart with a wound so painful and yet so sweet, that he fell into a deep swoon, and felt ever after the fire of Divine Love burning in him with a fresh vigour and power. His severity, and the apparent imprudence of his conduct, caused his superiors to recall him in 1636; he prepared promptly to return, and to leave unfinished the work of direction which had cost him so much.

At Bordeaux, he gave himself up to his old work of preaching and direction. He was ordered to preach the Advent at S. Eloi, a sermon every Sunday and Wednesday, while the other days of the week were to be filled up by discourses in four different convents. He first tried to make use of some of his old sermons, for his head was unable to work, and his health was feeble. But he found this was of no help to him, and he threw all he had ever written behind the fire. That this was done by God's direction was proved by the

wonderful stream of thoughts and ideas that flowed from his lips; and he owned he felt his heart dilated and mind full of light when he had cast himself thus entirely on God. Perhaps it was at this time that, entering his favourite church of the Carmelites, on Epiphany, he found a fashionable audience awaiting a fashionable preacher. News came that the Abbé was unable to fulfil his engagement, and the Religious, hearing the Father was there, pressed him to take his place. He had no more time to prepare than the moment it took to put on his surplice; and his mind, clouded with spiritual troubles, was unfit for anything. But in an instant he had a complete plan before him, a contrast between the real littleness and seeming grandeur of the great, and on the lowliness one should bring to the feet of the Holy Infant. The whole audience was amazed and profoundly touched by a wonderful sermon.

In 1637 the Father was recalled to Loudun. His successor had asked to have

the benefit of his experience, and once more Surin tried to exorcise the Prioress. He was successful, and she was freed on the Feast of St. Theresa, 1637; but he had paid his price for the cure. He and the Superioress had solemnly vowed to make a pilgrimage to Annecy, the shrine of St. Francis of Sales, and to this he had added the heroic sacrifice by which he offered himself to take her place, and be subject to the possession under which she laboured, if only she might be freed. Compassion for her sufferings no doubt dictated this strange act. But his love of humiliation was perhaps the chief motive. He wished, as he had desired at Rouen and Marennes, to be dead to the world. It was in the parlour of the Ursuline Convent that he offered himself up. His sacrifice was accepted, and he became the sport of the demons.

While yet engaged in his exorcisms in presence of crowds that had flocked round, —the Duke of Orleans being among the number,—while still vested in surplice

and stole he was cast down again and again to the ground. God had revealed to him in one of his retreats that, in answer to his prayer for humiliations, his whole life should be one of contempt and disgrace. As he owned afterwards: "I have asked God to be contemned, and He has given me what I asked with both hands (*pleins mains*)." The convulsions, which lasted for over twenty years, began on Good Friday, while in the house in company with several other Jesuit Fathers, several officers of M. le Laubardemont, Royal Commissioner for the trial of Grandier, being there at the time. He was unable to say Mass for some months. Spite of this terrible condition, Father Surin set out on the 1st of April, in 1638, with another companion, to visit Annecy, going by way of Toulouse, Avignon, and Grenoble. He was most kindly received by St. Jane Frances Chantal.

On his return he met Mother Jane of the Angels, who had, by order of the king, been sent, by the Archbishop of Sens, to

Paris, where she was an object of curiosity to Louis XIII., to his wife, Anne of Austria, the Cardinal Minister Richelieu, and the whole court. At Grenoble, Father Surin said Mass for the Visitation Nuns the first time after his possession. He then returned to Bordeaux, where he had to enter still further into the purifying furnace of humiliations and tortures.

He frequently lost the use of his limbs, and was completely dependent on others. He suffered the most terrible pains, which no human skill could relieve. His food became tasteless, and the devil would often prevent him helping himself. For a long time he was unable to read or write; and for eight days was entirely dumb, and nearly blind. He was forced to make his confession by signs. To the day of his death, he suffered from dreadful headaches.

Such were the extravagances that the demon caused him to commit, that his superiors were obliged, from time to time, to shut him up as a lunatic. And so, in-

deed, he was considered by many, while others judged him still more harshly. From time to time, with hopes of relieving him, he was sent to the houses of different friends. In one of these visits, being like a child, he was entrusted to the charge of a man, who, as if himself possessed, conceived the greatest aversion to him, treated him with the most brutal cruelty, and used to beat him about the head. Father Surin never uttered a cry, much less did he complain to his host of the treatment he had to endure, or even show signs of displeasure towards his brutal keeper.

In the midst of all this physical suffering, he was constantly assaulted with the most powerful temptations against his faith, his purity, his confidence in God. Fearful scruples harassed him, and he was urged to end his misery by suicide. Even his Blessed Mother seemed to have turned against him. In the midst of all this, he never abated that confidence he had always preached to others, and the

slightest want of which he had always considered such an outrage against God. His great weapon was continual prayer; and though his mind was so chained that he could not think, he would kneel in silence before the Tabernacle, offering up his inaction and incapability;—the demons making sport of him all the while. He had long before reached a high state of contemplation; yet, when most busily engaged at Loudun, he never hindered his active duties. He used to compare prayer to wine, which, if it loses some of its sweetness and brilliancy with age, gains in strength and worth.

This unshaken trust in God gave him, in spite of the temptations and torments he endured, a great spiritual joy, and in the midst of hell's severest assaults, he composed his spiritual canticles; singing, in the brief intervals of pain, songs expressing his delight in sufferings.

Indeed, as he owned, whatever tempests and clouds covered the lower part of his soul, the light of God's presence ever

made glad its summits. While in this state, he was quite unable to make any preparation for his sermons, but when obedience sent him to preach, no sooner had he made the sign of the cross, than he found a perfectly arranged discourse before his mind, and such strength and vigour in its delivery, that his medical man considered the whole supernatural. In the same mental stupor he dictated his Spiritual Catechism. He describes his mind during its composition to be like a man in a darkened room, for when, by favour, every now and then the shutter was thrown open, and light was given for a brief space, the words flowed from him as if he was repeating some familiar prayer, and when he resumed the dictation, he never was obliged to ask where he had left off, or what had been the last word. Prince Conti, so well known for the part he played in the civil wars of France, and who owed his conversion to his virtuous wife, the niece of Cardinal Mazarin, got hold of this work, and,

greatly to the author's annoyance, and without leave of his superiors, gave it to the world.

In the helpless state we have described, Father Surin commenced, also, to dictate his Spiritual Dialogues; until, one day, seizing the pen,—after having been deprived of the use of his hand for eighteen years,—he wrote with perfect freedom, nor did he ever again lose that power. The little esteem he was held in during life, accounts for the fact of none of his works being published, during his life, with the exception of the one mentioned above. The ardent desire God had to purify this soul during life, is strikingly instanced by what happened to him once during his state of utter helplessness. The lay-brother who attended him, used sometimes to put out his candle before the night examen, so as to be able to get to bed earlier than the rest. Out of a human condescension, he said nothing of this breach of rule; but he was visited

with great sufferings in consequence, which lasted for an hour.

In his desire to do penance, he never spared himself, usually wearing a very severe hair-shirt and girdle, and every day taking the discipline, and often even two or three times a day; while, for more than a year, he used to scourge himself for three hours at a time. The devil in his rage, once, when the Father was at S. Macaire, a house of the Jesuits, some twenty miles from Bordeaux, hurled him out of a window, and down a precipice. His thigh-bone was broken by the fall, and very clumsily set by the surgeon.

But God did not allow this to impede his works of zeal, for though unable ever afterwards to walk without a stick, he could take long journeys, when obedience and charity required.

Day at length began to break through the clouds. As he had given peace to Mother Jane of the Angels on St. Theresa's day, so on the Feast of our Lady of Mount Carmel, in 1656, after long years of thick

gloom, he enjoyed four hours of spiritual light. But it went out again, to re-appear at rare intervals, until the last three or four years of his life, when he possessed his soul in profound peace. He resumed, by degrees, his correspondence and works of direction, as his faculties came back to him.

The closing years of his life, God inundated him with most intense spiritual joys, which overflowed into his body, giving it the strength to resume all his active duties.

His delight was then to visit the hospitals, and perform the most distasteful services for the poor sufferers; or to go from village to village, teaching to the poor and the children the A. B. C. of faith. He had still much to suffer from Pr. Batide, who contradicted his views of spiritual life. His thoughts were taken up entirely by the Passion of our Lord, which he had learned so well to fathom, by his own experience. One evening, kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament, God revealed to him his approaching

death, and he watched out that whole night there. He prepared for his end by redoubling his austerities. Shortly after, he fell ill of three different diseases, each of which was deemed sufficient to cause death. This was about the Feast of St. Joseph, 1665.

He got better before Holy Week, but on Good Friday he grew worse than ever.

His great grief was, that a sort of stupor prevented him from praying; and he accused himself at his last, for not having taken the disipline more than twice during his illness. It was touching to hear his frequent outbursts of clamorous love towards God. He received Holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction, in presence of all the community, with great simplicity and humility, begging pardon for the faults he had committed, and for the scandal he had given by his eccentricities. The beautiful things he said about his vocation brought tears to the eyes of all.

He died on April 21st, 1665.

The following is a list of his works, with the date of their appearance, copied from F. F. De Backer's Dictionaire des Ecruains de la Compagnie de Jesus.

Catechisme Spirituel, 1661.

Les Fondements de la Vie Spirituelle, tirés du livre de l'Imitation de Jesus Christ, 1669.

Cantiques Spirituels de l'Amour Divin, 1694.

Lettres Spirituelles, 1700.

Dialogues Spirituels, 1704.

Predicateur de l'Amour de Dieu, 1799.

Le Guide Spirituel, 1836.

Lettres Inédites, du Père Surin, 1845.

A. J.

THE SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FATHER SURIN, S.J.

LETTER I.

To Father Louis Lallemant, S.J.

ON MEETING WITH A YOUNG MAN WONDERFULLY ENLIGHTENED IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.

May 8, 1630.

I would that I had enough proficiency and enlightenment to be able to give you a faithful account of the fortunate adventure with which God was pleased to favour me on leaving Rouen, by my meeting with a benefit which I cannot sufficiently prize, I mean my encountering one of the most rare souls I have ever known, from whom I received extraordinary assistance. I found myself placed in the coach next to a young man about eighteen years of age, very simple and rough in his whole appearance, and particularly so in his speech. He could neither read nor write, having passed his whole life in a priest's service, nevertheless, he

was filled with all kinds of graces, and with such exalted heavenly gifts, that I have never yet seen his equal. He was never instructed by men in the interior life, yet he spoke of it to me with so much subtilty, such fulness and solidity, that all I have read or heard said about it, is as nothing compared with the value of his discourse to me. From my first discovery of this treasure, I contrived, as far as I possibly could, to seize every opportunity of speaking to him in private. I held no conversations with any but him, and we two had our meals alone together; when we were not conversing, he was continually in prayer. His way of praying is very sublime. He began at first with ecstacies, which he says are imperfections, but from which, according to his account, God has now withdrawn him. The groundwork of his soul is a profound humility, a great simplicity, and an admirable purity. Through favour of his simplicity I discovered much that was very wonderful in him, but his humility concealed a great deal more from me. I put him through every point of the spiritual life, both speculative and practical, which suggested itself to me, and during three days he satisfied all my questions, and gave me answers that filled me with astonishment. Directly he had reflected upon what he had said to me, he would have thrown himself at my feet to humble himself. He believes and asserts himself to be one of the greatest sinners that has ever lived, and he often begged me to believe it. He spoke to me for nearly a whole morning of various states of the highest and most perfect union with God; of communications of the Three Persons of the Holy

Trinity with the soul; of the incomprehensible familiarity of God with pure souls; of the secrets God had made known to him concerning the proceedings of His justice, with regard to souls that do not advance in perfection, even though they desire so to do, and of the various orders of the angels and of the saints. He assured me that he would not part with one of the divine communications which our Lord makes to him in a single communion, for all the happiness the blessed angels, or all mankind could give. He affirmed that a soul, well disposed by purity, is so entirely possessed of God, that He keeps in His power not only all the impulses of this soul, but even those also of her body, with the exception of certain little errors whereby the soul sins. These are his own expressions. He told me that the first thing a soul that wishes to give herself to God should do, is to become acquainted with herself, and to correct her faults; that it is not sufficient to ask for perfection; that we must do violence to ourselves to acquire it, and that if all religious are not perfect, it is simply their own fault; that persons are ordinarily wanting in the constancy necessary to conquer themselves; that one of our great evils consists in our not making a good use of the sufferings and infirmities of the body, for that God has great designs for us in them, uniting Himself to the soul much more perfectly through pain, than by great consolations; that excessive care taken of one's health is a great obstacle; that true prayer consists not in receiving from God, but in giving to Him, and in returning to Him by love the bounties received from Him; that when the

peace of the soul on fire with divine love turns to a ravishment of delight, her fidelity obliges her to shun these kinds of transports, and the more to empty herself of all the nearer God draws to her to fill her. He confessed that at first his interior practice had been to accept the gifts God made him, but that now it consists in referring them all to Him and giving them Him back again; in detaching himself continually from all things, either natural or supernatural, so as to rest in God alone, and to acquiesce solely in His good pleasure. He added, however, that, notwithstanding all the soul may do to divest herself of everything, God does not cease to make her feel His sweetness, and to reveal His deep secrets to her; and that souls raised to the state of the most sublime union make continual progress in the discovery of the secrets of God. I asked him what these secrets were. He told me they were those of His providence over souls led by very obscure paths; certain particulars of the mysteries of our Lord Jesus Christ; the manifestation of the power that God gives to the devil over the world, and over the saints of the Church militant. I propounded all my interior difficulties to him, as if I were speaking of some one else, otherwise I could not have extracted anything from him. He satisfied me in such a manner that I questioned whether he were not an angel in human form. I remained doubtful until, at Pontoise, he begged me to confess him, and give him the communion. He would never promise to pray to God for me, but said he would do all that he possibly could, that, in fact, to do so, did not depend upon him. I have

no doubt but that he has attained to that state of the spiritual life, in which it is said souls are so completely in the power of the Holy Spirit, that it is He who directs all their actions, so that they only act by the impulse of grace. St. Catharine of Genoa notes this in her life, and adds that when the soul has reached this state of entire dependance upon grace, she cannot pray for any one unless God permits it. I asked him if he had a devotion to St. Joseph. He answered, that for the last six years this Saint had been his protector, and that our Lord Himself had so appointed him, no one in the world having advised him to choose him for his patron. He said that God had made known to him that St. Joseph is the greatest of all the saints, after the Blessed Virgin and the holy forerunner of our Lord; that he had the fulness of the Holy Spirit in a far more excellent manner than the apostles; that he has special sway over souls whose virtue is destined to be hidden in this world, as was his own; that, if he is not known according to his merit, it is because God has willed, as a reward for his eminent purity, that only pure souls should be sufficiently enlightened to appreciate his excellence; that he was a man who maintained great silence; that in his home he spoke but little, the Blessed Virgin even less, and our Lord less than either; that the Incarnate Word scarcely spoke to them but with His eyes, His glances simply serving Him for words to manifest to them that which He wished them to understand. He told me one of the first virtues that God gives to a soul He possesses is prudence; that the supernatural light which God

pours into the soul shows her more clearly what she has to do, than the sunlight manifests sensible objects; that the multitude of things which the soul, illuminated with this divine light, discovers within herself, is greater than all that is contained in the whole compass of material nature; that God with all His greatness dwells in the humble, simple, pure and faithful heart, and makes Himself known to it; that certain operations of God in the soul are miracles so great that they astonished him more than if he had seen all the dead brought to life; but that God is not sparing of miracles in favour of a soul that has attained to perfect union. As I pressed him to tell me whether he had not had a director, who had instructed him, he said he had not; that he had had no other master than the Holy Spirit; that even were the sacred books lost, he could dispense with them, God having Himself taught him enough of them for his salvation; that there are souls whom creatures cannot prejudice, God being all in all to them; that God is present to these souls, and that in a coach, while laughing and entertaining themselves charitably with their neighbours, they cease not to undergo meanwhile extraordinary operations of grace; that even during the night, when they are obliged to give the body rest, they lose but very little time; that he could not explain to me how this takes place, that I knew more about it than he, and that he was the most ignorant person in the world. He told me wonderful things for the consolation and direction of a soul who, feeling the greatest attraction to prayer, and having an ardent desire to advance in the spiritual way, finds herself

retarded by the infirmities of the body; that God requires of her an angelic patience and a steadfast equanimity of mind, a gentle acquiescence in His commands, a generous self-abandonment to His providence, perfect indifference to life or death, and a great contempt for all earthly things. After which, if she is faithful, and it pleases God to make use of her for His glory, He will repair in one hour all the ravages that the infirmity may have inflicted upon the body during several years. I told him that the Blessed Aloysius Gonzaga had been forbidden to meditate upon God, on account of a headache that tormented him. "Oh! what a heavy cross!" he answered; "I assure you it would be the most cruel mortification that could befall me." Then, correcting himself: "See," said he, "father, how imperfect I am, in testifying that this would be so painful to me, since the execution of God's Will should be to us preferable even to the enjoyment of God." One of his most exalted discourses was that in which he spoke to me of the manner in which God works everything in the interior of souls by His word; and of the correspondence souls should have with God through the Word Incarnate, in all their dispositions, especially when in suffering. Our Lord has taught him not to be scandalized at any one, but instead always to excuse his neighbour. This he does in two ways: The first is by the maxim, that God leads souls by different paths. Thus, when he cannot like a thing, he says: "God inspires some in one way and some in another; as for me, He does not inspire me with that." The second way is by attributing all to simplicity.

Now, as I saw certain things which I could not excuse, I asked him how he could call these things simplicity. "One must," he answered, "find some means of excusing one's neighbour, and it seems to me a convenient one to suppose that these good people do what they do from simplicity, without taking heed to it." As for things evidently bad, he reproved them with an ardent zeal. Thus, a woman who was with us in the coach, having broached some wicked discourse, he told her, with holy passion, that he would rather be in a coach full of devils than with her. One day, seeing a rider pass by us in a scarlet cloak, he said to me: "Father, those good people, following the inclination of pride, choose such brilliant colours that they may be seen from afar, and cause themselves to be dreaded by the semblance of fire and light."

In one of our conversations he told me that the two things by which we can reap the most, are obedience and the mortification of the impulses of the soul; that there is not a moment when, if he was watchful, he did not find something to give to God, and in which to mortify himself; that austerity of life is not true mortification, because it is not necessarily united with holiness, as is interior abnegation; that it is in this that the real progress of the soul consists; that he thought kings and princes unfortunate, in that it is almost out of their power, through their position, to practice mortification.

As we were once speaking of prayer, I asked him which is the best disposition for this holy exercise: he answered, "Simplicity and humility,"

adding, that simplicity may be very eminent in a great mind. I asked him in what true humility consists: he said, in the knowledge of self, through the experience of our own wretchedness; and that, to be humble, it is not sufficient for a soul to possess the knowledge of her miseries, but it is further necessary God should make her feel them. He said that persons of our profession, who do not combat the pleasure that there is in being praised of men, will never enjoy God; that they are thieves who rob God of His glory, and that the darkness of their minds is ever increasing; that the least little useless thing obscures the soul; that what hinders the freedom of the heart is a secret dissimulation existing habitually within us, which closes it up. He told me several times, that what is most dangerous in the interior life, is to loose the bridle to the appetites, which, while they are being followed, cause darkness to deepen in the soul, and render it still more incapable of treating with God; that the reason we receive so few caresses from God, is that we do not withdraw ourselves sufficiently from intercourse with men, which should only be entered upon from necessity or from charity; that, until the soul has acquired spiritual liberty, exterior things always prejudice her; that God only gives His treasures to humble and recollected souls; that watching over ourselves prevents the wanderings of the senses, which we scarcely ever give way to without offending God; that a soul who is disengaged from her own interest, can watch almost continually over herself without injury to the health of the body, and that it is in this vigilance that the faithfulness of the

soul consists; that familiarity consists in the communication of secrets; that all the Saints did not attain to this intimate union and familiarity with God; that the Saints correspond to the different orders of the blessed spirits; some to the inferior angels, others to the seraphim, in proportion to the grace they have had, and to their co-operation with that grace; that we should aspire to burn continually with the love of God, but that we remain cold, for want of renouncing ourselves and our own inclinations; that God is very liberal and very just.

In short, reverend Father, this young man said such a great quantity of things to me, that I should be at a loss to write them all. I can assure you that the three days I passed with him have been worth whole years to me. That which I particularly remarked in him, was a prudence all-divine, and a wonderful power in his words. Every evening, before going to rest, he came to prostrate himself before me and to ask my blessing. He did this with so much humility, that I was quite surprised at it. When we separated, he begged my pardon a thousand times for having spoken to me, as he said, with so much pride, being so uncultivated, and only destined to serve God in the humility and simplicity of such temporal employments as concern our neighbour, not in matters spiritual. He said also that God obliges the souls He favours with His graces and His intimate familiarity, to keep those graces secret, hiding them in silence, and that he repented having opened his heart to me so freely. I was, in fact, obliged to employ great tact to

induce him to speak. I feigned to make but little account of him, and persuaded him that he was bound from charity to entertain me with some good discourse, since I could not always be speaking. By this means I caused him insensibly to enter upon the subject. He became full of fire immediately, and, drawn out of himself, gave way to his fervour, following the impetuous force of the Holy Spirit who animated him. When, however, I recommended myself to his prayers, he began to be mistrustful, standing upon his guard. But, being extremely simple, and thinking himself the least of all men, he betrayed himself more than he supposed. I cannot express, reverend Father, how much instruction I gathered from the heavenly doctrine with which he is filled. But that which most touched me, was the example of his life and the fragrance of his virtues, which breathe an air of admirable sanctity.

Please ask our Lord to give me grace to profit by this fortunate meeting.

In Him, I am, &c.

LETTER II.*

To Father Louis Tillac, S.J.

THE ADVANTAGES THAT ACCOMPANY CHRISTIAN PERFECTION, AND THE DISPOSITIONS IT REQUIRES.

August 25, 1661.

I bless our Lord a thousand times for the extraordinary desire which I see He gives you, of rendering yourself pleasing in His sight, and of labouring with all your strength at the work of your perfection. When this generous design has been conceived, I believe, that to succeed in it, it is necessary to enter into profounder considerations than those which ordinarily come before the view of the greater part of religious and of devout persons. This is what urges me to communicate to you some thoughts which have come into my mind upon this subject, together with those which presented themselves to me during my year of retreat, when I was affected by the same wish as yourself. I have collected them together, and have composed from them the letter which I send you.

The most desirable state in this life, is that of Christian perfection, which consists in the union of the soul with God. This union, which is

* This letter is an excellent rule of conduct for souls that begin to give themselves to God.

created by the exercise of divine love, and which some holy persons call a union of fruition, when it is perfect, contains within itself an abundance of good things, which the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, and which the heart of man has never conceived.

These blessings are, first, such a close familiarity with God, that there are no friends upon earth who converse oftener. No friends have with each other more facility, more openness, more unreserved outpourings of heart than the soul has with God, and with each of the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. She enjoys, secondly, a very deep peace and tranquillity; thirdly, a great liberty of mind, which raises her above all things to a state in which she dreads nothing; fourthly, an extraordinary strength for action; fifthly, a wonderful guidance in every enterprise; and, sixthly, an infinitude of other celestial gifts, such as glorious victories, singular discoveries in the knowledge of supernatural truths, and the solid joys and priceless treasures of spiritual riches. It is to this happy lot that all Religious, and all souls that have an especial vocation for a holy life, are called. If they do not attain to the enjoyment of this happiness, if they have not some share in these heavenly gifts, it is entirely by their own fault that they are deprived of them, since the Spirit of God disposes them to this end, and incites them to it almost continually. But they oppose Him, either by open resistance, or by a secret refusal. This happens from their want of courage, or because they willingly allow themselves to be deluded by the errors and false reasonings,

which their disordered affections and self-love suggest to them. In short, the cause of their unhappiness is that they will not follow our Lord by the entire abnegation of themselves, but, attiring themselves with the mere appearance of virtues, they in heart still retain the vices of the old man, pride, sensuality, curiosity, attachment to their own judgment, and much of the malice and perversity of Adam. Through this they go on without ever acquiring the sincere humility, the holy simplicity, the benignity, the gentleness, the patience of Jesus Christ, without cordially loving His doctrine, without establishing themselves in interior peace, and in purity of heart. So that God, finding in them everlasting obstacles to His operations, abandons them, I do not say as reprobates, or as persons fallen from grace, but as excluded from that perfection to which He had called them, as cowards and unworthy of the guidance of His Holy Spirit, and of His special favours. Thus they remain feeble until death. To human sight they may pass for good and perfect men. On account of their natural talents, together with their skill in veiling their interior shortcomings, and in conforming themselves outwardly to the duties of a holy life, they may be employed and placed in office, or held in high favour by the world. But, in the eyes of God, they rank in some sort as hypocrites and impostors. And when the secrets of their souls shall be made manifest before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, they will have to confess themselves full of self-love, vanity, and presumption. By Him they will be condemned, not perhaps to hell, the Sovereign Judge not find-

ing in them mortal sins, but at least to a terrible purgatory, for that is the goal which those souls at length reach, that do not give themselves up steadfastly to the interior life. To avoid this misfortune, we must apply ourselves wholly to the study of Christian perfection, and generously embrace the means which lead to divine union. The chief are, self-knowledge, penance, recollectedness, interior peace, constancy, and diligence in holy exercises.

I will only propose them here in abridgment, having treated of them very fully elsewhere.

1.—*Self-knowledge and Penance.*

The first disposition necessary for attaining to divine union, is to enter into the deepest recesses of our interior, with the help of the light of the Holy Spirit. We must freely own to the corruption and disorders which exist there, deplore them with true repentance, and effectually correct ourselves of them. This is a point of such vital importance, that a soul undertaking to work out her salvation in earnest, must incessantly ask God for the light necessary thoroughly to know herself. She must esteem this grace one of the most precious that can be received from heaven, and from the depth of her misery must utter cries and groans continually, to oblige the divine mercy to grant it to her. Let her feel confident that, after long and fervent entreaties, God will grant her this favour. Let her cut herself off for several days from all society and diversions, to think only of herself; and in this retreat fathom her heart and

penetrate its most secret motions. With a severe and piercing glance let her try to discover the malice of her intentions, corrupted by self-love and self-esteem; and, that done, let her accuse herself of them before God, condemning herself at every turn, and inwardly annihilating herself, till she dare not lift up her eyes to heaven through confusion and pain. This kind of proceeding may seem to be unreasonable and excessive, but I believe that unless it be undertaken we shall make but futile efforts towards perfection, and never draw ourselves completely out of the mire of our vices. I say this distinctly, and it is the sentiment of the Saints: if we do not look upon venial sins as the greatest sinners regard those that are mortal when they are converted; and if we do not act, with regard to the first inordinate impulses, as timid consciences act with regard to sins of deliberate purpose, then in vain do we aspire to sanctity or to the great graces that lead to and accompany it. We must, then, clothe ourselves with the same spirit with which Magdalen and the publican were animated at the time of their conversion; in this spirit draw near to God, and by the grace of the divine light examine our conscience with the utmost severity, believing that to shed a torrent of tears for the least of our vices, is, after all, but very little. We must admit no thought which excuses or lessens our faults, but rather face them in all their grievousness, exaggerating them as much as we can, without fear of excess, unless we should happen to be tempted to despair. This is the true spirit of holy penitents, in which there is generally nothing that oppresses or agitates the

mind. On the contrary, there is experienced a great calm and a sentiment of love, which fills the soul with sweetest consolation. The more a soul has of sorrow, the more she has of peace, because her confidence increases according as her repentance deepens; and the more pain she feels for having displeased God, the more she hopes that God will grant her mercy, and in that she rests all her joy. Here is the entrance to the kingdom of God. It is by this road only that we attain to the possession of the riches of grace, which are promised to perfect souls. And the reason the number of saints is so small in this world, is that there are very few persons who have either sufficient courage to set about this exercise in good earnest, or sufficient constancy to continue it for as long as it is necessary. For the foundation of Christian perfection is humility, which can only be acquired by a feeling sense and knowledge of our miseries; that is to say, of our sins and of their roots.

This humiliation of the heart in the exercises of penance is not necessary for those alone who are in mortal sin, but also for innocent souls who are leading a slothful and imperfect life, if they wish to withdraw themselves from their state of lukewarmness and sloth. But it is very difficult and very uncommon to rise out of this state; for we are generally only affected by graver sins, and we do not conceive those great sentiments of sorrow for faults that we consider slight. It is on this account, as I have said, that there are so few Saints to be found in the world; and it is also for this reason that the souls really enlightened

of God, speak of themselves as if they were the greatest criminals on earth, although they have not committed great crimes or mortal sins. What is called the "purgative life," is no other than this penitent life, which is the first story of the spiritual edifice, where we should not only labour to remove actual sins from the soul, but even the roots of these sins, cutting off all the principles of sin, all the inordinate inclinations of nature, to such a degree that they no longer produce any disturbance. Now, this great work being above human strength, we cannot carry it out, if we are not assisted by very great grace from God, and if we do not co-operate with a generous and constant fidelity. This co-operation consists in what I have just said, namely, in entering deeply into ourselves, in watching over all our actions, in examining the motives which induce us to act, in observing the passions which hurry us off, and the disordered impulses of our hearts. Having taken notice of them several times, we shall come in consequence to the knowledge of the cause, that is to say, of the habitual vice which produces them. Then it is for us to seek out the remedy, to be on our guard during the occasions, manfully to resist attacks, and, when conquered, to weep over and punish our cowardice. We must also persevere in the combat, never letting ourselves be discouraged or wearied. Indeed, we must make all this our ordinary interior occupation, at least for a time, and until the Holy Spirit shall have drawn us up to the state of divine union.

2.—*Recollectedness.*

To penance must be joined recollection; for how shall we know our faults, if we do not keep the ear of our heart always attentive to the voice of God, who warns us of them, and the eye of the mind always open to the light of grace, which shows us them, with their remedies? It is easy to see, then, how very carefully the soul should preserve within her a profound silence, and how free she should keep herself from that confusion of images which extraneous objects imprint upon the mind. The first duty of recollectedness is to keep our senses closed to all outward things, not of necessity, or obligations of our state, permitting to them no voluntary action, for which we could not give such a reason as would satisfy a wise man who might inquire its motive. We must admit nothing into our mind that might divert our soul from her attention to God and to herself. We must, above all, shun all useless curiosities of the mind. We are borne into them by the violent longing we naturally have for making trial of an infinite number of things by the senses. We must see all that presents itself, hear all that is said, smell, touch, taste all kinds of objects. We cast our famishing thoughts with avidity upon the imagery of all the things of the earth, and this inordinate appetite creates a very great disorder within us. For the faculties of our soul, exhausted in their search after these vain gratifications, and returning from the pursuit all wearied and harassed, are found incapable of collecting their

strength within, to apply themselves to the spiritual exercises, and have no longer the necessary vigour to unite themselves to God. We must, then, arrest them by recollection. Without this restraint we shall find ourselves incessantly taken up with things as mean and puerile as those which occupy children, and our application to supernatural things will be but very superficial, and will not cease to be very tedious to us; whereas it would be wonderfully solid and very pleasant if we were really recollected.

The second duty of recollectedness is to employ great vigilance in guarding the tongue, and great circumspection in our words. By the use of our senses we receive within us that which is without, and by that of speech we bring forth without that which is within. Now, it not only concerns us to watch over ourselves that nothing idle enter within us, but also that nothing disordered come forth. For if the soul flows forth in too much speech, it is inconceivable how much she distracts and enfeebles herself for interior functions. The reason of this is, that by much speaking she stirs up in her imagination many thoughts, which before were slumbering, but which awake by the effort the mind makes in choosing to speak, and to communicate itself to others; for speaking is more an act of the imagination than of the tongue. It follows from this, that in order to have the imagination calm, the mind serene, and disposed to receive the light of God, we must not disturb the ideas that have heaped themselves together in it for a length of time, and which remain at rest there, as filth does at the bottom of a vessel full of water so

long as it is not agitated. For if we come to shake the vessel, the water is troubled and rendered impure by the mixture of this mire, and cannot recover itself until it be allowed to rest. It is the same with our soul; an infinite number of impressions of all sorts of objects have been heaped up there, which remain in its depths in repose, and do not disturb the liberty of its functions. But if, from the desire of speaking, the soul arouses herself, these images are stirred up and disquiet her, until she forces them to subside again by silence. This, then, is an important point to which we must carefully give heed, weighing well all our words, and having such a control over our tongue, as not to be like the friend of Job; for he, indeed, felt himself so urged internally by the wish to speak, that if he had not done so he said he would have burst. Nor should we be like those who have contracted such a habit of chattering, that they always say more than they intended, being unable to maintain the just moderation which prudence demands. It is certain that a man who cannot keep silence has no solid virtue, and that he is subject to inconstancy, to levity, and to great distractions.

The third duty of recollectedness is not to mix ourselves up with the affairs of others, or to take cognizance of them, excepting when our conscience is charged with them.

Perhaps this is the most necessary point of recollectedness, as there is nothing which so draws a soul out of herself as intermeddling with that which concerns others. It is, however, in this very point that curiosity most tempts us, and S.

Augustine remarks that we are by nature as curious to know the lives of others, as we are idle in correcting our own. Of all the images of created things which imprint themselves upon our soul, there are none which occupy it so much as those of the persons with whom we live, or whom we know; and he alone is really solitary, who does not behold other men, even though he might be accompanied by all the rest of creatures. That is why a soul who wishes to apply seriously to the knowledge of herself must, according to the advice of all the Saints, withdraw her gaze from others, as having enough to do to guide herself; otherwise she will assuredly fill her mind with useless visions and superfluous cares. She will be astonished to find uneasiness and indignation rising up in her heart every moment against the faults of others, and she will hardly be able to keep herself from speaking of them. A false zeal, excited by her impatience, and to which her curiosity has given occasion, will consume her unceasingly, engrossing her in such wise that she will lose her peace by it. A little while and she will find herself full of considerations for others and desires to please them. The observations made by her on their way of acting and inclinations will appear to impose some kind of obligation to follow their example. She will fear to displease them, or to incur their contempt, if she do not do as they. This is that slavery of human respect which is one of the greatest hindrances to the progress of souls in virtue. So that, if only for the motive of the desire to follow the light of God, and to imitate Jesus Christ and the Saints, we ought to prescribe

this law to ourselves, not to regard what others do, but, taking for granted that they are trying to do right, consider only what is our own duty and the Will of God. To this end we should always keep our eyes cast down, not allowing them to rest upon others, on their actions, or on their countenance, especially when we are present at any public service, in any assembly, when passing through the streets, or about the house. We should acquaint ourselves with nothing but what concerns us; we should not give ear to news of the world, nor even of religion, unless we deem it likely to excite us to praise God, and to practice virtue. Moreover, we should wait for this news to come to us, and not be eager to seek for it. Whosoever acts otherwise, will find that his mind occupies itself very unprofitably all day long. He will only fulfil, to satisfy his obligations, the important actions of the day, and those which regard the divine service, but his prayer will be full of distractions, his reading superficial, his sacrifices cold. At the examen of his conscience he will be examining those of others; he will revolve a thousand chimeras in his head, he will put himself out of humour, entertaining his fancies; he will sit in judgment upon an innocent man without hearing his defence; he will form a thousand ill-founded suspicions, a thousand rash judgments; he will entangle himself in the affairs of others; he will give order about a thousand things, remaining disordered himself. Let us then take, as a rule for our conduct, the counsel that S. Vincent Ferrier gives us, of turning away alike the eyes of our body and those of our mind from others, so

that we may be the better able to see ourselves as we are.

3.—*Interior Peace.*

The peace of the soul is another disposition upon which our spiritual advancement absolutely depends. It is easily lost, and there are persons who never possess it, although they may have lived long in the practice of spiritual things. It is lost by too much activity of mind, by an impetuous manner of acting, by an over amount of business, and a multiplicity of occupations, by scruples and uneasiness of conscience, by ardent schemes, by vehement passions, and by a thousand other roads open to the enemies of our repose. This interior peace is so necessary, that the greater number of souls, for want of having established themselves in it, accomplish nothing: and until it has been acquired, at least in some noticeable degree, we are as yet only in confusion, and are going back in the way of the spirit. For, to be capable of receiving the operations of God, we must be empty and free. Now the soul who is not at peace is occupied by the enemy, that disturbs and troubles her, so that she cannot apply herself to God and to herself. The principal source of this disorder, to apprehend it rightly, arises from a littleness of mind, which makes us to have too much esteem for the things of this life, and too little for things divine. This perversity of ideas and of opinions renders our souls mean, grovelling, and subject to a thousand weaknesses. We esteem things important that are in

reality of little consequence, and this error causes us to be very easily moved on their account.

Contrariwise, owing to the narrow compass of our mind, we do not form a sufficiently exalted idea of eternal things, which, if they were well understood, would undoubtedly absorb all our esteem for things temporal, and would leave us free and exempt from the trouble these cause us. A soul that prizes God and His service highly, and that looks upon all else as nothing, is careful not to interest herself easily in any other thing than God. She is completely filled with this great and excellent good. In proportion to her esteem of it she regulates her joys and her sorrows, her desires and her fears; and because she knows that God cannot be taken away from her, she dwells in a profound peace. But a soul that, from her littleness, cannot comprehend or embrace God, fills herself up with the esteem of created things, such as honour, pleasure, knowledge or authority. And because these things are disputed with her every moment, agitations arise incessantly within her, which disquiet her, and interrupt that interior action, in which consists the service of God. She has a continual craving to get possession of and fill herself with the good things that affect her. Those of which I have just spoken are proportioned to her capacity and appetite. Therefore she incessantly aspires to them. In regard to them she forms ardent and determined plans. These, even though they should not be crossed, must necessarily weary and afflict the heart from their very intensity. Then follow oppositions, often only apparent and

imaginary, often real: through which are excited suspicions, distrust and vain hopes. A collision of the passions takes place, against each other and against reason; and the whole are at war against the external causes of opposition. The soul is the battlefield, and this war never ceases until our thoughts are changed, and until we come to despise that which we before esteemed, and to regard with esteem that which we judged worthy of contempt. Then the troubles of the soul cease, and all its movements turn towards the one and only Good, which, banishing from her all these disagreements, unites her scattered powers and raises them to that higher sphere where a perpetual serenity is enjoyed, which winds, storms and tempests cannot reach. We must then own that the only remedy which can deliver us from our troubles, is to judge of things according to their worth; to form great ideas of God; to learn to despise the world; to make little account of that which must die and perish; to meditate continually upon the treasures which have no end; in no way to care for the opinions and esteem of men; to see that knowledge is but great ignorance and a mental toil ordinarily very useless; that to possess great riches is to be a great slave; that to live long is to be long miserable. Being persuaded of these truths, we shall have a great esteem for God and for His service; we shall make more account of one step in grace than of winning a crown; of an act of humility than of the reputation of being a learned man; of loving God than of having command over the whole earth. In this manner the soul, dilating and

raising herself above all by a generous high-spiritedness, will look upon all those enemies who formerly attacked and braved her, even in her secret chambers, as infinitely beneath her; and they who once were to her a law shall receive the law from her. Thenceforward she will begin to know what she is, and to stand in awe at the thought of that which she is destined to be. In this light she will prefer the knowledge of herself to that of all the secrets of nature, and will put herself to more trouble to remedy one little sin, than to recover from a long sickness. Now the sentiments of penance enter within her heart; the anxiety to be corrected of her faults is her principal thought, and since the first and chief motive which, inducing her to get rid of all that, however slightly, might retard her perfection, is the desire of pleasing God, and of disposing herself to render Him worthy service, she makes, day by day, fresh progress in the spiritual life. In truth, what greater folly than to take so much pains about a thing of little moment, or of no consequence at all, and to be insensible to that which is alone important? Is it not better to correct the least of our vices, than to acquire the riches of a whole world? Let us then surrender the false ideas we have of human things, to take up true ones, that thus we may procure that peace, without which we cannot undertake the work of our perfections.

The exercise of this peace consists, first, in espousing nothing with ardour and activity, considering that the thing is not worth it, and that its possession could not make up to us for the loss of our repose; secondly, in not concerning our-

selves with the affairs of others, unless we are obliged to do so by justice or charity; thirdly, in calming all the impulses which arise in the soul with any vehemence, ruling them, or quenching them by prayer, according to the counsel of S. James: "Is any one sad among you, let him pray;" fourthly, in taking care not to turn over unprofitable thoughts in the head, but rather to stifle them at once, because the thoughts, when we retain them for any time, vividly represent the objects, and this representation rouses affection, which is soon followed by passion and agitation; fifthly, in flying from the occasions in which we feel ourselves most disturbed, and the objects which excite the appetite most violently; sixthly, in avoiding skilfully an accumulation of affairs, which induces eagerness in us, and makes us act too much. For, to give ourselves wholly to God, we must cling to nothing, we must be free, and have some time left after having done what is our duty and in our charge.

When a soul has made some progress in interior peace and recollectedness, she will infallibly perceive the spiritual light in her to increase, and the facility of knowing herself. She will discover a quantity of vices which she did not see at all before, and will begin to feel an alarm about things, of which she had made no account. It will be very useful to her to read the lives of the Saints, and of persons who have raised themselves to the perfection of the state to which God has called them: for the vision of their purity will make her better penetrate her own disorders; considering how far she is removed from these

great models of virtue. She will employ the greater part of her time, and all her interior exercises, in recognizing and laying her finger upon her diseases, in deploring them and humbling herself for them, and in procuring remedies; making frequent reflections upon the good or bad use she has made of these remedies, observing what obstacles hindered her advance, and how she may be able to surmount these. All these things should be done gently, with love, with confidence, and with very great assiduity.

4.—*Vigilance and Assiduity in the holy Exercises.*

This is one of the most important dispositions for attaining to Christian perfection. I esteem it so necessary that without it we shall not do in a year what we ought to do in a month, or rather, we shall do nothing at all. It may be called the key of the spiritual life. At first it is somewhat wearisome, because, in order to practise it, we must fight against our natural indolence, against that licence we would fain have of doing in everything that which pleases us, and against the various passions which rise up within us, when we wish to restrain ourselves. But in the end it becomes very easy. Besides, would we wish to do less for God than men of the world do for their temporal interest? See what a merchant does to succeed in his trading; what is done by a good artisan, by a diligent scholar, to become skilful, the one in his trade, the other in branches of knowledge. Let us do as much, and we shall

attain to the perfection to which we are called. But if we are not assiduous in the holy exercises of our profession, we shall be as those merchants who gain nothing, as those artisans who are for ever apprentices, as those indolent scholars who make no progress in letters. This constant application is absolutely necessary in the work of perfection, because God wills that man should do this work conjointly with Himself. Now as diligence should be proportioned to the importance of affairs, and as nothing is more important to us than to correct our faults and to purify our souls in order to dispose them for the operations of God, it is easy to see with what vigilance and attention we must apply to this work. I may say without exaggeration, that this vigilance must be continual, and that it must extend to all our actions, whether interior or exterior, even to the smallest. We must not perform a single action without examining its motive, and seeing what God requires of us in respect of it. We must have an eye to the manner we set about what we would do, so as to prevent the disorders of self-love and the effects of those vicious principles, which ordinarily insinuate themselves into all our actions. This doctrine is founded upon a most certain truth, of which it is extremely important we should be well persuaded. It is this, that so long as we despise little things, whether for good or evil, any real progress is impossible. For we are good or bad, according as our life is made up of good or of bad actions, that is, actions of which the animating principle is good or bad.

But the greater part of the actions which make

up our life are little, and inconsiderable in themselves, great opportunities presenting themselves to us but rarely. Our ordinary actions are to rise, and to lie down, to eat, to converse, to read, to write, to pray. If we do such actions as these badly or imperfectly, our life will be bad, it will be imperfect and grovelling. A man is not virtuous only at the time he performs some act of virtue as occasion offers, but when he so habitually possesses virtue, that his manner of acting is in all things virtuous. If we content ourselves with exercising virtue on great occasions only, we shall never attain to the possession of virtue. We must never relax in our practice of virtue. At all times, and in every encounter; at home, out of doors, at table, in company, in study, at recreation, we must always practise it: that is to say, we must always act with an upright intention, in the presence of God, without any evil or impure views. By this means the habit of acting supernaturally and holily will soon be formed within us. But if we do these sort of things without any deep motive, in a low and imperfect manner, following our natural impetuosity, we shall then feed the lower or vicious principles of our nature, creating an eternal obstacle to those which are above and supernatural. We ought, therefore, to watch over the smallest matters, apply our attention to them, rule them, direct well their aim, purify and elevate their motives, esteeming all important and worthy of notice. For the exercises of devotion we must have a yet more assiduous care, never omitting them without reason, whatever may happen, whether it be on account of a journey, a fresh occupa-

tion, or any other change, for it is by them that our fervour is kept up. Now for *this* diligence and exactitude are required; for on these occasions, if we are not careful, we easily dispense ourselves from our ordinary exercises of piety; a thing that very much retards our spiritual advancement. It is again a point of great consequence, to renew, if possible, every hour of the day, the desire of our perfection and the good purpose of straining after it with all our might. To do so is extremely useful in sustaining the soul, for it prevents her from sinking back, by her natural weight, into a thousand triflings to which she is inclined.

5.—*To what Assiduity should apply itself in particular.*

Assiduity must extend itself to everything. There are, nevertheless, certain exercises of such importance, that if they are neglected nothing solid can be accomplished, and if we practise them exactly they preserve all the rest, and maintain the soul in a continual advance. The first exercise, to which we must unremittingly apply ourselves until a habit has been formed, is to have ever a pure and upright intention of doing all things to please God, casting aside all human motives, and all those low and sordid interests, which naturally insinuate themselves into all our actions.

Diligence employed in this exercise is one of the most powerful springs of spiritual direction. It is a secret which transforms the heart, and

turns it from earthly and carnal into heavenly and divine. The soul, then, that desires to advance in perfection, must not undertake or do anything without having formed the intention of doing all for God. She must represent to herself unceasingly how just it is to satisfy His most adorable Majesty, exciting herself to please Him, until she feels herself so touched by this noble motive as to act only from its principle. At least, let her take care that the contrary intentions, such as those of her own glory, or of pleasure, or of human respect, do not overcome or divide her heart, as is generally the case. He who makes this exercise of a pure intention once a day only, in the morning, for instance, will not advance; nor even if he but seldom forms this pure intention, because the contrary habits he has of acting for his temporal interest, or to please men, will take their course. Nor, in the end, will these contrary habits be destroyed, for they cannot be but by acts of a pure intention, and that constantly practised on all the occasions in which the other impure motives are inclined to spring forth.

The practice of this purity of intention consists in this. The soul was formerly accustomed to follow the impetuosity of her inclinations and the attraction of pleasure, mistrusting nothing but what appeared to her plainly sinful. Now she begins to proceed less hastily, making a halt, first in her most important actions, then in those of less consequence, and afterwards in the smallest. She examines into the motive and the instinct which impel her. When she discovers that it is curiosity, or sensuality, or the inordinate love of

pleasure, or the desire of pleasing some person, or her own satisfaction, which she passionately seeks, she holds herself a little in suspense; and collecting herself within, condemns the intemperance or the imperfection of the motive which presented itself to her. Then, representing to herself what she owes to God, and how just it is to refer all to His glory, she excites herself as best she may to embrace this sublime motive, and tries to preserve it in the course of the action, without ever losing sight of it if possible. It is by this constant practice that the complete reparation is made, by little and little, of corrupted nature, of a nature corrupted in its intentions and perverted in its ways, through self-love and frequent falls into sin.

The second exercise which must be constantly kept up, is the amendment of our life and a change of habits. If we do not work at this seriously, and with a constant application, the soul will never make the progress she should in virtue, the evil having struck too deep root in us to be plucked up by an indifferent or an interrupted toil. This change of life is what our Lord and His holy apostles preached to the world: "Do penance; let each one be converted from his evil life." In order to carry out this exercise it is necessary that, besides the general good purpose, which must often be renewed, of not suffering any voluntary imperfection in ourselves, we should also undertake in a particular manner the correction of that vice which most opposes itself to our spiritual advancement, and which influences the greater part of our actions. It is this vice that we must watch most assiduously. We must never permit

its attacks to go unresisted, nor pardon ourselves at all in this matter. The vices thus to be fought against are an over-activity, a hastiness and vehemence in our movements and in our actions; a certain levity in our senses, with distraction of mind or outpouring of ourselves on exterior objects; an attachment to search after our own pleasures and conveniences, or to the satisfaction of our own will in all things; an indolence, carelessness, and self-love, which make us think ever of ourselves, incessantly talk of ourselves, and refer everything to ourselves; a harshness with regard to others, an aversion for certain persons, a readiness to judge ill of others; a certain vanity, curiosity, impatience, gossiping spirit, sensuality, &c. When we have recognized in ourselves any one or several of these vices, we must be prepared to pass our whole life in combating and uprooting them; first all in general, as much as we possibly can, watching unceasingly over ourselves, to defend ourselves from all ill; secondly, in particular, one after another, taking up each one for a month, or for a good space of time sufficient to weaken them.

During this time we must make frequent reflections upon the fault which we have undertaken to vanquish, bringing it before us in all our examinations and often in our prayers, in order to fathom it, to obtain a horror of it, and to attack it vigorously. A fervent soul, and one that desires to advance in solid perfection, will not suffer a single action or an hour of the day to pass, without making a little review of her conduct, to see how all has fared, with regard to that which forms the matter of her particular examen. This was the

practice of S. Ignatius, and it is one of the counsels of S. Teresa: "*Examine yourself,*" says she, "*before each action and at each hour of the day, with a purpose of amendment, and by this means you will attain to perfection.*" And indeed, it is the shortest and straightest road by which to reach perfection, since the soul, thus purifying herself, is best disposed for the divine operations.

The third exercise to which diligence should be given is that of the presence of God. It is esteemed one of the most essential of all the spiritual exercises, inasmuch as nature, which of itself inclines to error, riot and sin, cannot be restrained by any more efficacious curb than the thought of the presence of God. For this reason we should be persuaded that the thought of God has the same relation to the guidance of the mind, that the light of the sun, or of a torch, has to the guidance of the body; that as we are in danger of injuring ourselves and of stumbling at every step when we walk without light, so when we have not God to guide us we are in danger of falling into many errors, and easily wounding ourselves.

Let us then render the thought of the presence of God continual, and not be content with representing to ourselves from time to time that God is within us and that He sees us. For although we may draw much fruit from this thought of God renewed at intervals, it is, nevertheless, not sufficient to raise us to perfection. For, as our Lord says, "he who walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth;" that is to say, he does not advance, and he is in want of light for guidance. Now the light of our spiritual guidance is no other

thing than the divine ray; and the favourable look of the countenance of God, which draws us to Itself, and renders us attentive to His presence. The soul that proceeds on her way, out of this view of God's countenance, and away from His presence, guides herself by her own light and her own impulse. This light is so blind, and this impulse so perverse, as we well know, that they will never lead her but to herself, or to low and imperfect ends. So that if she has not God ever present, what she has gained at one time she will lose at another, there being nothing capable of keeping her to her duty and in the practice of the supernatural actions, but the vision and consideration of God. When she forsakes it she lapses into human motives, which cause her continual losses, actions done from such motives being of no worth for eternity. The practice of the presence of God consists in that the soul, instructed by faith, represents God to herself not by any figure or imagination which she forms, but by a simple knowledge that God is what He is, and that He is within her, full of majesty, of power, and of goodness. So she goes to God and unites herself to Him with a respectful love, as sweetly, as attentively, and as often as she can.

From this exercise, constantly practised for a considerable time, there grows up in the soul a state of light, which discovers to her her faults and the things she ought to do. This again leads to a filial fear, which restrains her on a hundred occasions, in which she would otherwise run into evil; a confidence, a tranquillity of mind, a purity, a devotion, a holy joy, and an infinitude of good

things, but, above all, a firmness and stability in virtue and piety, which can only be acquired by this means. It is inconceivable what a difference there is between a soul that has made the presence of God habitual to her, and one that only has it at intervals; how much the former excels the latter in wisdom, in strength of mind, and in purity. Nor must it be said that the presence of God is one of those extraordinary gifts not given to all, but the privilege only of a few elect souls. It is a grace offered to everyone, and can easily be obtained, so much so that, with a little diligence, it will be as easy to have God present to our thoughts, in all our actions, and even in the most important and the most urgent, as to keep our eyes open or to breathe. I say more: we shall receive from this presence of God a facility and a freedom of action in all our interior and exterior occupations, and an increase of strength to go through them, according as God may will, and as the thing itself requires.

The fourth exercise which should be practised with assiduity is the mortification of the appetites of the heart. Through this exercise we must die unceasingly to all our appetites, and retrench, as much as possible, all gratifications, whether of the senses or the mind, practising what is taught in our spiritual catechism and in our dialogues. The soul should make it her study to deprive herself of her pleasure in all those things which give her a base and purely human gratification, when this pleasure, that is, keeps her under its curb, captivating her, and holding the mind in bondage. This must be done at all times, not with eagerness

and anxiety, which might injure the head, but with the same attention which we are wont to give to any matter we have much at heart. The soul should never allow herself to go after that which is gratifying to her curiosity, vanity, or sensuality. She should seek no support, satisfaction, or content, but in God, imitating S. Ignatius, who, from the first year of his conversion, when stopping at Manresa, made it his whole study to accord no pleasure to his senses. All the Saints have practised this exercise, and it is for want of a strict rigour in its performance that the greater part of Religious and of devout persons make scarcely any advance. This is what the book of the Imitation of Christ teaches throughout, but principally in the chapter where it asks why there are so few souls raised to contemplation, and it answers that it is because we are very restricted in our plans of mortification. To this mortification of the cravings and desires of the heart must be added corporal penances, which are a marvellous help to spiritual progress. Souls that are at all fervent incline with great ardour to these austerities, generally practising some one or other every day, if they have health.

Now it is a thing not a little remarkable, that among Religious and devout persons we find many who, through a too great love of themselves, and an over fear of incommodities, grounded on ideas of fleshly prudence, enjoy but rarely good health, because they refuse to God what they could give Him of bodily macerations. And it is a tolerably common illusion in this age, to make little account of exterior penances, under pretence that true per-

fection consists in the interior. As several holy persons have greatly exalted the interior life, feeble souls have taken occasion therefrom to dispense themselves from several exterior practices, and among others from the mortifications of the flesh. This proceeding of theirs withdraws them, more than can be expressed, from the perfection which they aim at in idea. I do not believe that anyone has ever attained to a degree of eminent virtue, without an especial ardour for penances.

Such are the principal points in which assiduity appears necessary.

Conclusion.

When a soul has done all that we have just said, and has spent three or four years in this work, or more, according to her need, it very often happens that our Lord, who conducts her and acts as her guide the whole of the road, makes her to experience some special grace of His operation. It was of this kind of grace that S. Francis wished to speak when he asked of God *His Holy Spirit, and His holy operation.* It renders itself so manifest and so sensible to some persons, either in or out of prayer, that the soul cannot doubt that God governs her by His Holy Spirit. As she has applied herself with great care and constant attention to all these holy exercises, our Lord now makes her more free, taking her as it were by the hand, without her any longer making so many reflections upon herself, or toiling so much on her part. He directs her in all her conduct, and she needs only to follow and to correspond to grace.

Sometimes God takes possession of her, as though reigning in all her faculties, and inviting her with love to give herself all to Him, liberally and without reserve. She enters as if into a new region of sweetness and of liberty, where she is at large, and without making any effort to place herself in the presence of God, she finds herself in Him, feels herself invested with a supernatural strength, and sees that, having beaten down her senses by mortification, she enjoys a tranquil peace, which relieves her of the perpetual care she formerly had of restraining herself. The mind is master of all the powers, and, without taking thought, determines all that the body should use for its necessities. Sometimes also, God, willing to raise the soul to that perfect union, of which I spoke at the beginning, makes her pass through severe trials and through terrible pains, according as He may know such trials to be profitable to her, and as the designs He has for her are great. By these pains, as by a great purgatory, He purifies and prepares her for the extraordinary favours He wills to accord her. This is the conduct pursued by God with regard to the holiest souls. He gives them the occasions of purifying themselves by sufferings, and when they are purified He introduces them into the kingdom of His peace, and into the possession of such perfection of happiness, as we can enjoy in this life.

I pray our Lord to accord us this grace. It is in Him that I am, &c.

LETTER III.

To the same Father.

IN WHAT THE SERVICE OF GOD AND CHRISTIAN PERFECTION CONSISTS.

After having shown you what a person must do, who wishes to turn perfectly to God, and to pass from a lukewarm and cowardly life to a state of fervour, I deem it necessary to make you see in what the true service of God consists, and how it requires our whole application. This is what I have tried to explain in the letter I send you.

Upon a closer consideration of the life and conduct of persons who make profession of Christian perfection and of the Religious state, it may be said that the most part only serve God by halves, and with many restrictions. There are but very few who serve Him with that perfect entirety of heart, which the service of this Sovereign Master demands. The true service of God consists in the powers of the soul being totally and continually applied to doing His will, and augmenting His glory. In all the employments of our life, in all the application which we give to created things, we should not consider the interest of the creature, but in its relation to that of God. What we do for the creature should take its first origin from God, and from Him derive all its vigour.

The affection we bear to the creature should not

be a different thing from the love we have for God, but it should be, as it were, an extension of it, the divine motive overcoming, and subjecting to itself, all the other motives with a predominating power, as that which alone has the right to reign sovereign in the heart. In order, then, to serve God with the perfection He deserves, we must not admit of any other aim in our actions, or in our conduct, than that of the good pleasure or the glory of God. All our desires and all our aims must be to please God, forgetting all else; whether we are doing penance for our sins, or labouring to get rid of some vice, or endeavouring to acquire some virtue; whether we employ ourselves in the conversion of souls, or render some service to our neighbour; in all these things there must be nothing to actuate us but the aim and design, either of obeying God, or of rendering ourselves capable of doing His pleasure and procuring His glory. These motives must so fill our heart, as to leave in it no room for any human considerations, no more than if there were but God alone in the world.

To act in this manner is to have a pure and upright intention. Not but that I admit that there are other good and praiseworthy intentions not so exalted, nor that I am of the opinion of those, who will have it that out of this pure view of God all must be bad. But I only purpose here to speak of the perfect service of God, for which, indeed, the less perfect acts of virtue serve as dispositions; and I say that perfection requires that we should act from the pure and disinterested motive which I propose. What mystics call "per-

fect annihilation," "transformation," "deiformity," is no other thing than this entire application of the soul to God, by which we die to all things and to ourselves, and live for God alone. It is to this perfection that S. Ignatius binds his children in his constitutions, when he commands them to seek God in all things, to despoil themselves, as much as possible, of the love of creatures, so as to give all their affections to their Creator; loving Him in all creatures, and loving all creatures but in Him, according to His most holy and divine Will.

This application of the powers of our soul to God, so as to render Him a perfect service, must have two conditions: it must be entire, it must be continual. And, first, the duty of employing all the powers of the soul wholly in the service of God, is founded upon three reasons: upon the law of God, upon God's very nature, and upon our advantage and profit. Let us consider the law by which God commands us to love Him: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." These words clearly indicate that God exacts for His service the whole application of our powers and of our strength in all their fulness. In asking all, He excludes nothing; and in consequence, if we give to God all that He ought to have, nothing will remain to us, neither for ourselves nor for creatures, unless in so far as we and they have relation to God. For, if we give them any part of our application without relation to God, we diminish our powers by so much, and do not serve God with that fulness of heart with which He wills to be loved and served.

That which Jesus Christ teaches in the Gospel, that no one can serve two masters, means the very same thing as this first law commanded us by God. God does not suffer that we should divide our heart between Him and creatures. Jesus Christ cannot suffer that we should divide our service between two masters; and enlarging upon this subject, He so attaches to His service all our thoughts and all our affections, that He does not appear to leave us even the liberty of thinking of the things necessary to life, to such a degree does He wish to possess, Himself alone, all our mind and all our heart. Therefore He says, "Take no thought where you shall find food to support your life, nor whence you shall have garments to clothe your body." He commands us to have in view only the service of God, to occupy ourselves solely with the care of pleasing Him. We must abandon ourselves entirely to His Providence for the things necessary to the support of our bodily life, the providing of which might seem to demand with more reason a portion of our care. S. Paul teaches the same doctrine in his first epistle to the Corinthians. When speaking of marriage, he considers it a hindrance to perfection, inasmuch as the married have their hearts divided. The husband divides his heart between God and his wife; the wife divides hers between God and her husband. The Apostle plainly shows that he judges this division of heart to be contrary to the perfect service of God, since he counsels Christians to remain disengaged from the ties of marriage, if they have the courage, so as to be in a condition to think of God alone. It was with the

desire of perfectly accomplishing this law of God, that the prophet king exclaimed with a holy transport: "What is there in heaven for me? and what do I ask Thee of the things of earth, O Thou God of my heart?" He excludes all that is in heaven and upon earth. He puts everything out of his heart, to leave room for God alone. He will possess but God alone; he will be possessed by God only.

Indeed, when we consider how limited our faculties are, and how small are our powers, we shall not be astonished that the law of the love and service of God requires all and leaves ourselves nothing. Our soul has not a compass of immense powers, so as to render her capable of giving herself wholly at the same time to various objects. The more she spends herself by her understanding and her will on an object, the more she exhausts her strength; and however little she attaches herself to a thing, especially if it be by love, yet she is thereby the more enfeebled and less able to apply herself to other things. Thus we see that in purely human plans, when we devote ourselves exceedingly to some one, we either give up all others, or we apply ourselves but feebly to them. When we passionately love one person we forget all others. It is because the range of our soul is very narrow, and her powers extremely limited. It follows from this, that, since our duties to God in some sort exceed our power, if we divert to our own interests, or to the love of creatures, anything of the power we have of loving, we take from God a certain amount of what we give Him. If we check this outpouring of love towards

the creature, we better fulfil our duty towards God, and are so much the more fervent in the love of the Creator. Now God forbid that, it being in our power to love God more than we do love Him, we should give to other objects a love which belongs to Him, and which we can consecrate to Him. It is in this sense that the Prophet said to God: "*I will reserve my strength for Thee, Lord;*" as if he would say: "I will love but Thee, otherwise the strength of my soul will be scattered elsewhere, and I shall not be able to love Thee with all my strength." S. Augustine excellently expresses the same thought in these words: "*He does not love Thee enough, who loves anything with Thee, which he does not love for love of Thee.*"

We must then love nothing besides God, which we do not love for love of God; and the love we have for God must so absorb all the love we have for created things, that they make no impression upon our mind, unless as connected with Him. It is thus that the law of charity to our neighbour binds us to love him for the love of God; so that the motive which makes us love God should make us love our neighbour also. From whence it follows that, loving our neighbour but for the love of God, in loving our neighbour we love God more than our neighbour himself; or rather, we love but God in our neighbour, the love of our neighbour not being a different love from the love of God. Now if we are to love all created things in the same manner in proportion as we are to love our neighbour, we must love nothing but God in creatures; and according to the law of God there is nothing loveable for itself but God alone. If we

love any other thing for the sake of our own interest, our glory, our pleasure, or our consolation, we love it as something apart from God, and, in consequence, we love God by so much the less. God must then entirely fill our heart, and we must desire nothing but that which may contribute to His service and His glory. So that all the acts of love which we yield, must not only be compatible with the love of God, but must be as so many steps to increase in us this divine love. If we love creatures in this manner, far from being obstacles to prevent our love of God, or hindrances to the progress of His love, they will be rather helps to advance us, since in loving them we shall rather love God than them themselves, for we shall love in them God only. Behold here the means of preserving all our strength for God; for if, in our affections, we have ever so little regard, either to ourselves or to some other creature, our soul thereby loses so much of its strength. And the note by which to ascertain whether we love a certain thing for God's sake without any lessening of the divine love, is to sound our heart, and to see if there is in it any other motive which hinders, whilst it possesses our heart, the perfection and purity of the divine charity. With less than this we cannot exactly accomplish the sovereign law of God, who wills that we should love Him with all our strength and with all our being. The second reason, which shows that to render to God a true service, we must entirely apply to this service all our powers, is taken from the nature itself of God, and from His eminent greatness, which is such that it comprehends all that can be imagined

of good and desirable. It is a greatness not only infinite, but infinitely infinite, which contains all in itself, which reduces all to itself, and which so transcends all beings, that what is not eminently contained in it is nothing. Its dignity swallows up all dignities; its goodness all goodness; its honour all honours; its interest all interests; so that there remains nothing which should be considered beside it. That is why God is called All, and he who says God, says everything, the rest being nothing. His splendour and His light is like that of the sun, which swallows up into itself the brightness of all the stars, and reduces them, as it were, to annihilation in its presence.

"My God and my All," said S. Francis. Indeed, God so instils Himself by His essence into all created beings, and so provides them from His infinity with all that they have of power and of greatness, that if we seek in them that which does not come from God, or which is not perfected by Him, we shall find there but nothingness and sin: so powerful is this supreme greatness to attract all to itself.

Moreover, the dominion of God and the rights which pertain to it are so great, that in virtue of these rights He appropriates all to Himself, He possesses all; and we could not conceive for whoever it might be any sentiment of respect or of affection; we could not render to whoever it might be any honour, or any duty, which do not belong to God, which this sovereign greatness does not with justice exact for itself. This being so, what can remain for the creature? What will it have for its share in the human heart? If it come to

seek its portion, it will find that all is taken, and carried away, by a greatness which consumes everything, and to the value of which all is but as a little fire of straw, in comparison with a great furnace. It is for this reason that our God is called in Scripture *a consuming fire*, before which nothing presents itself which is not immediately devoured and transformed into it. There remains then no glory, nor interest, nor advantage, which we should regard out of this adorable greatness, and we are bound to employ in honouring, in loving, and in serving it, all that we have of power and of strength. And if we make any deviation towards the creature, it must be in order to bring it back to God, loving God in it, and loving it only in God.

Also, God wills that in all we do of good works with regard to one another, we should have Himself always before our eyes, even in those actions which seem least capable of being exercised on His account, as the relief of the poor and sick. It is for this reason that Jesus Christ says in the Gospel: "*As often as you have rendered these duties of charity to the least of My brethren, it is to Myself that you have done them.*" And this Incarnate God, one of the ends of whose Incarnation was, that He might thus render more easy the referring of all to Him, goes so far as to say: "*I was hungered and you gave Me to eat, I was thirsty*," &c. He becomes indigent and infirm in the person of the poor and sick, willing us to see Himself only in those unfortunates who want our assistance; so jealous a desire has He of drawing all our duties to Himself, and of enjoying

all the fruits of our being, that He will not let us do anything at all for the mere sake of the creature. He desires all for Himself without reserve. It is not only our reverence, our adoration, our love, our service, which He exacts; He asks us also for our compassion, our help, and our alms, and He receives them as if He had need of them. In vain, then, shall I regard my honour. My honour is swallowed up in that of God. In vain shall I consider my glory. The glory of God blots out all human glory. In vain shall my own interest come into mind. The interest of God is so great, that it leaves no room for such consideration.

Regarding, then, God in all things, and proceeding in all our actions but from the one motive of the love of God, all that multiplicity of views and of motives which generally divide the mind and the heart will lose itself, and there will remain no other object to the soul but God alone. S. Denis exhorts souls to this divine unity, in which he says that really spiritual men ought to be absorbed, and he takes it for granted that bishops are such, who are the shepherds of souls. S. Augustine humbly acknowledges in his confessions the grace God granted him in recalling him to His unity. From this unity he had separated himself to attach himself to creatures, thus unhappily spending his heart in vain, and dividing it between the various objects of his love. It is in this unity that we find interior peace, and a constant evenness of mind amid all the vicissitudes of life, according to those beautiful words of the book of the Imitation of Jesus Christ: "He to whom all things are one, and who recalls all things to one,

who sees all things in one, may indeed have a solid firmness of heart and a constant peace in God." Now, he to whom all things are one, who recalls all things to one, who sees all things in one, is he who, having shut out the view and the consideration of all motives derived from creatures, employs and fills himself only with the sole love of his God.

For if he comes to associate with himself some other thing, to which he has regard, without respect to God, he forsakes unity, he wrongs that greatness, before which all else becomes so little as to entirely disappear.

But it is not enough to apply entirely to God all our powers, it must further be done continually, and that too for three reasons. The first is drawn from time, which is of all things in the world the most precious. We have but very little of it for the work which we have to do. The art of perfection is very long, and life very short. All that wise men have said of the necessity of well employing time, which, being once lost, is never restored, can be applied to this subject more justly than to any other, since every other occupation, compared with that of the service of God, is vanity. Let then spiritual persons weigh well this consideration, and let them remember that at all hours of the day it is in their power to acquire eternal kingdoms, if they choose to bestow a little vigilance and skill. What better care than that which is taken for eternity? Working continually for God, we give a continual joy to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ, we are always in heaven in spirit, and we enrich ourselves for eter-

nity. Mark what diligence people of the world have. They do not lose a moment, they always seek the opportunities of earning, and embrace them with avidity. We may then always be employed on a precious work of cloth of gold and embroidery of pearls, by doing all our actions from the motive of pure charity; why then should we work at it only at certain hours, giving the rest of the time to weaving oakum canvass, or often even mere cobwebs? What a loss for God, whose glory we are bound to advance! What a loss for ourselves, who labour at our own advancement in procuring the glory of God!

The second reason is drawn from the nature of man, who can acquire nothing that is perfect without diligence; and this is one of the most important points of the spiritual life. We observe in all the sciences, and in all the arts, that to acquire a habit, be it moral, or be it intellectual, there must be constant application, and one that we can scarcely ever interrupt. Those who learn a mechanical art are tied to it from morning till night. Otherwise they would never become adepts. When we study philosophy or the other sciences we give our whole time to it, both in the class and out of the class. When you wish to learn a language, you apply yourself constantly to it. If you interrupt the study of it from time to time, you will never know it well. This constant application is still more necessary for success in the service of God, both because of the resistance of our own vices, which is extreme, and because of the evil inclination of nature, which tends always to imperfection and to relaxation;

because of the hindrances of exterior things, which encompass us on all sides; and, in short, because the spiritual life requires a provision of virtues, and this provision cannot be made but by working without intermission. See, then, what care the study of our perfection requires of us. For want of this diligence we see every day a number of persons, with a tolerably good will, remaining nevertheless without making any progress to speak of, and wondering to find themselves, after several years, still the same. Let us give an example in a particular case. Every one knows that recollection of the senses is necessary to perfection. Without it the soul is distracted, ill disposed to prayer, full of burning desires, subject to an infinitude of troubles, and incapable of ever raising herself to the spiritual life. But recollection must be continual, to produce any notable fruit in the soul. He who, having practised it at home, does not practise it on going out, or while making a journey, becomes scattered, and soon loses that which he had gained, for ever finding that he has to begin over again. He who guards his eyes in an assembly of people of the world, preserves his devotion; but if, leaving it, he goes to give ear to news, to inquisitiveness, and to frivolous conversations, he will find that he has lost the spirit of devotion. These interruptions spoil all. It is like drawing water in a sieve. What I say of recollectedness, may be said of purity of heart, of an upright intention, of the presence of God, and of all other holy exercises. We must undertake them with constancy, and persevere in the practice of them; otherwise the poor soul that aspires to

perfection, wearied out in the pursuit of her design, will marvel at the little advance she makes, and will groan beneath the yoke of two masters. The only remedy is to be determined to persevere in good, and to naturalize oneself, so to speak, in supernatural things, by custom, and by their supernatural exercise.

The third reason is drawn from the evangelical counsels, the words of Jesus Christ, and those of the apostles, who exhort us, in divers places, to employ ourselves in the service of God without intermission. "*Happy the servants whom the Master at His coming shall find watching,*" says our Lord. How many times does He repeat, *Watch!* In the passages in which He gives warning that He will come when least expected, He adds, "*Watch therefore, praying at all times.*" And elsewhere: "*We must always pray, and never weary.*" S. Paul often recommends this perpetual application to prayer; and S. Augustine says of his mother S. Monica, that she lived upon prayer. If then we are to give account to God of all the idle words which escape us, with yet more reason shall we have to give account of the useless actions we perform, and of the time which we do not employ usefully; we should therefore be continually watchful. In fine, all that proceeds from us belongs to God. He should possess all. All our free actions are the fruits of a tree which belongs to Him. Why should we suffer so great a number of actions to be lost, which ought to be turned to God's advantage or our own? Let us then be every moment in a condition to say with our Lord: "*Do ye not know that I must be about*

My Father's business?" It may be objected that such application seems impossible; that the human mind is not capable of such great attention; that this manner of acting does not suit either this life, where so much diversity is to be met with, nor the weakness of our nature, which requires relaxation. I answer that it is impossible for a soul accustomed to distraction, and nourished in self-love, if she aims at raising herself all at once to this perfection. It would even be dangerous to apply ourselves with too much exertion at first. A forced struggle might injure the head, and cause at last disgust for devotion. But it is easy for a soul that has already a little habituated herself to it, and that has made some progress in virtue. I say more. It becomes so easy to fervent souls, that the mind then inclines almost naturally to God. They do all for God with so much sweetness and pleasure, that it would be pain, and an insupportable toil, to apply themselves to low and frivolous things. That is why it is extremely important for us to know by what road we can attain perfection, and what dispositions we ought to bring with us to be able to advance towards it.

These dispositions are of two kinds, the one remote, the other proximate. We must by the first withdraw ourselves gradually from the tumult of distractions, and from the ordinary wandering of the senses, and try to employ ourselves in our inner life, finding in it our pleasure. There are souls to whom a single reflection upon themselves costs much, who can hardly make the least ascent without pain, and who, after an hour's

toil, have great difficulty in being recollected a moment, so much are they scattered abroad, and full of objects which dissipate them. These souls are far removed from the practice of the perfection of which we speak. Nearly their whole day is passed in vanities and frivolities, in search of the gratifications of self-love.

We must, then, first retrench our trivial desires, curb the outpouring of ourselves, fly mere curiosity of knowledge and useless conversations, habituate ourselves to interior exercises, and try to take pleasure in them. When we have conquered ourselves somewhat, our courage will increase, and then we shall have a care to the ordinary motives of our actions. Several times in the day, or at least at the commencement of the principal actions, we shall represent to ourselves how important it is to please God and to satisfy Him, exciting ourselves to act from this view and motive. When we have several days applied ourselves to this, we shall then watch carefully to put away all motives of self-interest and human respect, which would artfully insinuate themselves at every turn. We shall put ourselves in ambush to detect them, and when perceived, shall give them battle and turn aside our will from them. We shall often meditate how far the good pleasure of God, His satisfaction, His glory, are preferable to all other things. When we are well persuaded of the truth of this, we shall have no more trouble in shutting out all other motives for acting. Then, if we discover ourselves entering on some vain amusement, some frivolity, an idle word, a vain thought, a gratification of the senses, we shall have the fidelity

to stop at once, and to turn aside from it. But, above all, let us carefully shun all kind of idleness of mind. Let us keep ourselves always devoutly employed within ourselves; and whether we are going about the house, or the town, whether we are in bed, or that we are waiting for some one, to whom we wish to speak, let us take some pious object or some word of Scripture to entertain our mind. Finally, even in our recreations, let us only divert ourselves with good and holy things, and keep ourselves from jesting and joking, which debase the soul extremely, and are strongly opposed to the Spirit of God. Through this study we shall, by little and little, mould ourselves to holy exercises, and with the help of the grace with which God never fails to strengthen our good designs, with a little courage and firmness, we shall make rapid advances in the road leading to the goal to which we aspire. *He who persevereth to the end shall be saved.*

I ask this grace for you of our Lord, in whom I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

TO FATHER VINCENT HUBI, S.J.

OF THE SPIRIT OF PENANCE AND THE LOVE OF SUFFERINGS.

April 7, 1634.

You ask me in your letter of the 30th January, to write you something calculated to excite a heart to contrition, and to incline a soul to resign herself patiently to God in sufferings. It would need one richer than I am to satisfy your request well. I may, however, tell you simply, that I consider that to have a continual sorrow for our sins, is one of the fundamental points of the spiritual life. Properly speaking, it is in this sorrow that the true spirit of penance consists, which is the entrance to the kingdom of God. Our Lord began the preaching of His Gospel by calling to this penance. This same S. John Baptist preached to the people. It is extremely important to establish this foundation in souls that design to give themselves perfectly to God. They ought to hold it for certain that, in proportion to the height they would raise the edifice of their perfection, they must dig deep the foundation of sorrow for their sins. Not content with making their confessions well and fulfilling their penances, they must enter with a searching scrutiny into themselves, and, all inflamed with a great desire of pleasing God, pre-

pare to pass their life in sorrow and in tears, to deplore their infidelity towards Him.

One of the reasons why souls make, in general, so little progress in grace, and why there are but very few who attain to sanctity, is that the duties of the purgative life are too superficially fulfilled. The sorrows and the tears of penance are too soon given up, because they are bitter and disagreeable to nature. We do not dig or establish sufficiently well the foundation of humility, of which the principal stones are remembrance of and contrition for our past sins. There is nothing better, therefore, when a soul has been brought to a good conversion, than to put before her eyes the two models of penitence, S. Peter and S. Mary Magdalen, who never ceased weeping over their sins during the whole of their lives. In proportion as the soul is affected by God, she should the more establish herself in the spirit of compunction. She should resolve never to lose sight of the shameful view of her sins, but make satisfaction for them to God, to end only with her life. Now repentance, to be solid and perfect, must be exercised with the spirit of love. The oil proper to maintain the perpetual flame of this penitent love, is to fill the mind with affecting considerations, and the heart with generous resolutions and ardent desires of doing penance. We ought to look at ourselves with the eyes of an enemy, and as a judge looks upon a criminal, whom he feels himself obliged to punish according to the rigour of the laws. Our Lord has given this spirit, not only to those among the Saints who had been sinners, but also to those who had preserved their innocence. He gave it

to S. John Baptist, and in the Company of Jesus to the blessed Aloysius of Gonzaga, who, although he had always been an Angel in purity, practised all his life strange austerities. He gave it also to that other holy young man, John Berchmans, who had noted down among his other good purposes that *of performing great penances for the least faults*. We may even observe that the saints who have the most excelled in the love of God, have also inclined to greater excess of severity towards themselves. It is the practice of all souls really touched with sorrow for their sins, and who are converted to God in a spirit of love, to put themselves in the prison of penance, and not to come out of it, until our Lord takes them out Himself. He often does so, and by His Holy Spirit He evidently prescribes and commands a conduct more gentle and more free;—taking away by His divine consolations the severities which they had embraced.

The considerations upon which we may found this fervent resolution of passing our life in tears, in groanings, and in the holy cruelties of penance, are those proposed by S. Ignatius, in the first week of his exercises. These meditations are the terrible truths which faith proposes to us; the sight of the death which will surprise us;—the awful judgment seat of Jesus Christ, before whom we must appear; the hell which we have deserved. But, above all, come the remembrance and thought of the love of God towards us, of the graces with which He has prevented us, of the benefits and bounties with which He has loaded us, together with serious reflections upon our in-

gratitude to a God, who has given us such prodigious proofs of His goodness.

Let us contemplate in spirit the mirror of all holy penitents, Jesus Christ, in the judgment-hall of Pilate and upon the Cross. In the judgment-hall He appears as an object of abomination before a whole people, in the ludicrous equipment of a mock king; a wisp of thorns on His Head for a crown; a reed in His Hand for a sceptre; an old cloak upon His back for a purple robe; His Face all disfigured with spittle; His Body all torn with the stripes of the scourge; exposed to the gaze of an enraged populace, which sets Him below the most infamous of all criminals, and which cries out aloud: "Let life be granted to Barabbas, and let Him die! Let Him be crucified!" This sight is so touching, that it is impossible for a soul that sees herself criminal, and knows that a God, by an excess of love, has for her sake put Himself in this state,—not to be excited against herself; such a sight will surely make her, by a correspondence of love, determine to pass her days in sorrow, saying with the prophet: "*I will engrave this remembrance in my memory, and my soul shall wither with grief at the sight of this object, ever present to my mind.*" Behold what has made hearts harder than rocks melt into tears, and what has excited to penance souls, the most delicate and most filled with self-love. Nothing is so capable of forming within us the true spirit of contrition. From this easily springs the love and desire of sufferings. For, since an Incarnate God has been willing to appear in the state, in which Pilate showed Him to the people, what was

it for but to show, as S. Ignatius says in his constitutions, "that, from gratitude and from love of Him, we should desire to be esteemed fools, and glory in wearing His livery." Now the livery of Jesus Christ is the condition of one that is crucified; that is to say, a victim of all sufferings. Repentance, to be solid, must be exercised through love, and love is founded upon what I have just been treating about. Such, my dear Father, is the answer I give you to satisfy your request.

I am, with respect, &c.

LETTER V.

To Father Antoine Blanchard, S.J.

THAT ALL THE PERFECTION AND ALL THE HAPPINESS OF THIS LIFE CONSISTS IN A CONTINUAL CONVERSION OF ALL OUR AFFECTIONS TO GOD.

I have put off writing to you for a long time, awaiting the convenience of the Reverend F. R. Now for your answer, I will say, that I see no solid or desirable good in the world, but to have an intense and continual attention of heart, to render service to God. This service should be rendered Him in the way that glorifies Him most, that is to say, by our own interior union with Him in all things. We ought to be so united to God as to draw from Him, without interruption, a living power of grace

to act supernaturally and to raise ourselves to Him without ceasing. This elevation is brought about by the impulse of respect and love, in the pure light which His divine presence diffuses in our souls; for this light brings us out of the darkness of the forgetfulness of Him, which our abasement towards creatures, and our passions, cause in our hearts. It seems to me that a life of this kind is suitable to men of our profession. It does not always bring forth the flowers of sensible devotion, but it should be ever firm and invariable, in the faithful and fervent application of the soul's powers to the interests of God. We ought never to allow our own low and despicable interests to steal into the soul, but so act as that, when necessity obliges us to seek that which is agreeable to nature, we do so but for God's sake, with the desire of pleasing Him. By this assiduous study the soul passes from that state of pain and toil, in which her exactitude and fidelity held her, to a state of grace strong and sometimes delightful, proceeding from the divine union. This union is no other than a very pure enjoyment of truth, a love of it as inseparably connected with goodness and beauty: union so perfect, that it becomes a sort of transformation of the soul into God through Jesus Christ: "I in them and they in Me," says He, "so that they may be made perfect in One." To attain to this, we require a deep reservoir of faith, great perseverance, an invincible patience, a generous abandonment of ourselves into the hands of God, and an inviolable fidelity in rejecting all the satisfactions which we might enjoy out of Him. We must not seek after the enjoyment of any dis-

tinct or particular good, to find in it our rest and contentment, in any manner whatsoever, according to the commandment S. Ignatius, in his constitutions, gives his children, *to transfer all their affections from the creature to the Creator.* These beautiful words have a meaning of immense depth. When we fail to carry them into practice, we prevent the supernatural good from effecting any great result in us. This supernatural good would, if we were faithful, cause all created good things to vanish from our eyes, just as the sun, when it appears above the horizon, eclipses the stars, and makes them to be as though they no longer were.

The law of the love of God obliges us to forget creatures and to put them out of our sight; that is to say, to consider and to be affected by them so little, as to act just as if we had altogether forgotten them. Our heart should not arrest its course to desire, esteem, or enjoy anything out of God; but whatsoever we do, preaching, teaching, or conversing, we should do it for the sole interest of God, intending thereby to seek, find, and glorify God in all things. When a man acts in this manner, his life is wholly of grace. It is then that we attain to an experimental knowledge of God, that we touch Him, that we enjoy Him, that we rest in Him, and that we find in Him our whole contentment. In order to reach this supernatural life, every time we perceive that something besides God occupies us, that we lean upon that something, and take satisfaction in it, we should instantly snatch away our heart from it, and transfer it to God with a holy liberty. Let us then conceive great desires of establishing in ourselves this

divine life. Let us ask it in all our prayers, and above all, at the holy communion of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

It is in this perfect way that the apostles lived, and the other Saints, whom we honour. Who can tell the riches, the delights, the infinite treasures which the possession of this celestial life contains in it? Let those who know them, and who have had experience of them, tell us. Why do the apostles in their epistles promise us such great things? Why do they offer us "*the incomprehensible riches of Jesus Christ?*" What do they mean when they promise us "*a fellowship with God the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ?*" Why does Jesus Christ Himself promise to "*make Himself known to him who loves Him, and to sup with him who opens the door to Him?*" In what manner will He discover Himself but by the illuminations of faith, of a faith so excellent and sublime, that it will render the supernatural possessions of the soul as evident to her eyes, as are natural possessions manifest to the eyes of the body? Now it is by the sight of these divine treasures that we possess them; and possessing them we esteem ourselves rich, although we possess nothing of the gifts of fortune. In what sense could S. Paul say of himself, and of the other ministers of the Gospel; *that being poor they enriched many persons; that having nothing they possessed all things;* unless it were that, by the abundance of divine lights, which the holy apostle calls *riches of a full and perfect understanding,* they felt themselves possessors of the fruits of the death of Jesus Christ, and of the

treasures He has promised to those, who will give themselves to Him? Whence comes it then, that among those, who appear to have given themselves to Him, there are so few to be found who are conscious of having this possession? It is, doubtless, because there are few who are determined to withdraw their affections from creatures. There are few whose affections are wholly and completely turned towards God. For it is certain that he who forsakes all, finds all: the stripping off of the things of earth never fails to be followed by the fulness of celestial gifts. *Give all to win all.* After that a soul has thus divested herself of all; if, from love of Jesus Christ, and for His sake, she is bold to love His livery and to desire to wear it,—finding her pleasure in rebukes, in contempt and in shame,—then she is introduced into the secret chamber, where are tasted the sweets of the heavenly Bridegroom. These sweets are seen by the illuminations of truth, "in the brightness and in the splendour of the sanctuary," ever since the time that Jesus in His own adorable person consecrated ignominy and insults, the chalice which He drank to the dregs, in the judgment-hall of Pilate and upon the cross.

Now the love of Jesus Christ and the love of contempt are inseparable. This last is the closest tie of the union of souls with their Saviour, and the character of the spirit of the Company of Jesus. S. Ignatius proposes it in one of his rules, and here is found the deepest point of his most exalted doctrine. As he has so closely united his Company with Jesus Christ, he has cemented it to Him by this deeply penetrating teaching of the

love of contempt and insults; a love to be borne to them on account of those which Jesus Christ suffered, and from the design of honouring in them what He endured. Let us be His faithful disciples. I pray Him to grant us this grace.

Remember, my dear Father, Yours, J. Jos.

LETTER VI.

To Father Achille d'Attichy, S.J.

OF PERFECT DETACHMENT FROM THE THINGS OF EARTH TO GIVE OURSELVES UP TO THE LOVE OF GOD, AND TO THE CONTEMPLATION OF JESUS CHRIST AND OF HIS MYSTERIES.

Marennes, Oct. 3, 1634.

I feel glad to embrace the opportunity which presents itself of writing to you. To do so will be a gratification to the desires we both of us have of conversing together. I feel, however, my ardour somewhat cooled when I reflect that the letter which I wrote you last year with much care, has never had the fortune to reach you. This has been a great pain to me. Moreover, I frankly confess to you that I have found it so advantageous to the amendment of my life, to break through all intercourse with every one, even with my most intimate friends, and to efface from my memory, as far as possible, all objects save the things absolutely necessary; that the advantage which I have derived from this solitude inclines me to abstain from many actions seemingly quite lawful. I even

doubt whether the great goods, which I find in this general disengagement from all things, will not oblige me to maintain for the future a continual silence. There are many persons in your province to whom I am tied by a special bond, yet I have never written to them up to this time. I am not aiming at a justification of my conduct here; I only desire that you would have the goodness to excuse me, if I have failed in any part of my duty towards you. I assure you, Father, that this great law of love which we should meditate upon unceasingly, "Thou shalt love God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind," to be fulfilled according to the design of God, constrains to great duties; and it is inconceivable to what a degree God wills that we should be appropriated to Himself.

In our life we meet with a thousand occasions to hinder us in the fulfilling of the duties of this great precept. No object presents itself before our eyes which does not entice away our heart, unless prudence teach us to be on our guard. All creatures are so many snares for those who are little circumspect, of whom the number is infinite; for there is not one which may not, either by its attractions, or its opposition, prevent the heart of man from giving itself all to God, as it is bound to do. Surely, the great things which God has revealed to us of Himself, the marvellous works which He has done for us, the charming objects which He has placed before our eyes to win our love, do not all these things bind us to occupy ourselves entirely in the contemplation of what He proposes to us? Do not they merit that we

should apply all the strength of our minds to them, and in our actions have respect to their excellence. Nevertheless, alas! for want of withdrawing ourselves from the disorders of our senses, for want of recollectedness and of giving ourselves to prayer,—of cutting off all that there is useless in our life,—so many actions, reflections, communications, designs, desires, diversions, &c., which are not necessary;—these great things, these admirable objects, make no impression upon souls. The thought of some little design which our mind has formed to itself, will attract our attention much more than the sight of a crucifix, than the communion of the Body of Jesus Christ.

This takes place insensibly by means of imperceptible attachments, by a negligence which we do not perceive, if we are not illuminated by a very special light from heaven. Oh! how well is that time employed which is bestowed in preserving this light! I pray our Lord to communicate Himself to you, my dear Father, with such an abounding fulness, and to give you such a great sense of the advantage there is in waiting upon Him, that you may willingly die to all the gratifications of earth, and, withdrawn into the depths of your interior, may there make yourself a sepulchre, in which to remain buried in God with Jesus Christ, far from the intercourse of men, inaccessible to all the things of earth. Not that I would that we should withdraw ourselves in reality from the conversation of our neighbour, and from the application which we must give to the service of souls, according to the

duty of our vocation. I mean only that we should separate ourselves from the enjoyment and the gratification, which we might have in the use of creatures, to seek no contentment but in Jesus Christ alone, enjoying all things in Him and through Him, "*as people, who, being dead to the world and to self-love, live no longer but for our Lord Jesus Christ, and hold Him in place of father and mother, of brethren and of all things,*" as S. Ignatius commands his children in his constitutions. Now, in order that Jesus Christ may take the place of all things to us, much must be forsaken; and if I were asked what must be forsaken, I should answer: All things, great and small, without reserve, and without ceasing, at every moment of our life. And addressing myself to those souls, to whom I could make my voice heard, I would cry with all my might: Hasten quickly; what are you waiting for? a whole life is not too much to accomplish what you have to do. Begin promptly, so that, at least some time before your death, you may be engaged in the exercise of this great commandment of divine love: "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart.*" It is a deplorable thing to go into the other world, without having ever perfectly fulfilled this precept, in which the whole law is contained; and to present ourselves before God, having in our heart another love than the love of Him. As the greatness of God contains and absorbs all beings, and as His interests sweep away and engulph all the interests of creatures, even so His love should swallow up all the loves of all hearts.

I do not send you news of myself. I should

scruple to occupy you a moment with what affects me. I wish that our Lord Jesus Christ, in His incarnation, His life, His death, and in His glory, may engage you altogether; and may so fill you, that there remain in you neither remembrance, nor thought, nor affection for any creature. I pray Him to imprint His mysteries so deeply on your mind, that they may never leave it;—that your thoughts may be ever revolving the remembrance of His passion, of His death, and of His life, until you be called to appear before His tribunal; happy to have for your Judge Him, to whom you have consecrated your love. Pray to Him, if you please, for me, who am in Him entirely yours.

LETTER VII.

To the same Father.

OF THE SOVEREIGN GOOD OF THIS LIFE, AND OF ITS HINDRANCES.

Marennes, June 3, 1634.

It must be confessed that there is no such agreeable entertainment as to communicate with the friends of God, and to relieve by conversation with them the labours and weariness of our pilgrimage. I call it entertainment because the true and solid satisfaction of souls is found only with that Sovereign Comforter, Whose feast we celebrate to-morrow. It is He who puts the pen into my

hand to-day, that I may converse with you, and fulfil the request you have made to me. You desire, then, Father, that I should speak of the things which hinder the Sovereign Good. To give a meet answer I ought first to have banished them from my own soul. This subject brings me to such a sudden standstill, that I know not what to say, so great and important do I esteem it in itself, so wide-spread and abundant in its matter, so difficult in its research. I stand, as it were, in utter amazement, when I consider, that being destined for the Sovereign Good even during this life, we make so little effort to surmount the hindrances, which keep us from its possession. This sovereign good is no other, surely, than the possession of the gifts made by God to men. Forgive me if I say things beyond my comprehension. God has made us two wonderful presents: He has given us His Word and His love, and these two things are His whole riches and all His treasure. The possession of the Son of God and that of the Holy Spirit, is what I term our sovereign good. Whosoever possesses these two precious pearls may well sell all that he has, and disburden himself of it as of a useless load. He has received with these two gifts "*the light of life, and the fountain of living water, which springs up unto life eternal.*" He has in himself the kingdom of God; he is the living temple of God; his life is hid with Christ in God. Yes, if only we are willing to give up the trifles with which we amuse ourselves, we may in very truth possess, though under the veil of faith, the same goods which constitute the happiness of God.

Notwithstanding the weight of the miseries of this life, we may live and reign with the Father and the Son, in the union of the Holy Ghost. These are the blessings to which we were called the moment we believed the tidings, that God had carried love to such an excess as to die for us. From this time forth we enter into a new world, the elements of which are not *empty* and *powerless* as those of this visible world, but solid and full of a divine virtue; a world whose inhabitants live in peace, in liberty, in holiness, in truth, as kings and conquerors who enjoy the fruit of the merits of their Saviour. For this cause "*let us give thanks to God, Who has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Whither do our hearts tend? In what do we employ time? What exercise do we give to our passions? The body of Jesus Christ rests in me every day at the altar, as a deposit of divine love, and a pledge of the Holy Spirit. I am magnificently regaled at the table of God, and that with the same meats, with which He Himself is fed. I am replenished with the mysteries of God and the splendours of His majesty. The riches of God surround me on every side. The consolations of God are presented to me. An incarnate God both dying and glorious is given into my hands in one and the same mystery. The glory of the Eternal Father is made over to me as a thing which belongs to me; and shall I not be filled with sentiments of joy suitable to the greatness of these delightful blessings? Shall not these divine objects engage my thoughts during the short life that I have to pass upon earth? Shall this fulness of delights leave me empty and

famished, from my not giving them the attention they deserve? That, however, is the unhappy state of souls, that do not remove the hindrances, which prevent their possessing the sovereign good. These riches and these delights of grace are prepared for them, nevertheless they enjoy them not; but are in poverty, in captivity, in fear, in a thousand troubles. Whereas generous souls that smooth their road to perfection by labouring to take away all obstacles to it;—these feel in themselves the kingdom of God, have even in this life foretastes of eternal happiness, satiate themselves with the spiritual sweetness, and possess all in separating themselves from all. But what shall we say of these hindrances? Here you are just expecting something from me, Reverend Father, where I find myself most perplexed. I pray the Holy Spirit, who penetrates all things, even that which is most deep and hidden in God, to give you a full understanding of what concerns this matter, the most important, and perhaps the least known, of the whole of the spiritual life.

So many things prevent our enjoying the sovereign good, that I am seized with astonishment when I think of it. To pretend to sum them all up in a few pages of a letter, would be to say nothing. The shortest way of finding them out would be to place our soul in a most still silence, disengage it from all things as much as possible, give it no affairs to embarrass it, withdraw it very much into itself, until we at last discover the way by which we may raise ourselves to the continual vision of God, and behold the splendid beams of the uncreated light, keeping ourselves free and at

peace; far removed from all the desires and fears which could assail us on the part of the creature.

I think that, if the soul so acted, she would from thenceforward easily detect the hindrances in her way towards the possession of the sovereign good. But because there are few who strive to find out this interior calm in the vision of the divine light, or who are vigilant enough to prepare themselves for this grace, and to maintain themselves in it, it comes to pass that, not only do they not discover these hindrances, but they have no idea that such hindrances exist in them. Nay, what is still worse, they voluntarily attach themselves to them, and think that, in so doing, they render service to God. I would say then, to a man who desires to know that which concerns his spiritual progress: "Withdraw into your interior; close the doors of your senses; fly all kinds of pleasures; perform no useless action; receive no impression on your soul of any object which is not necessary; unceasingly empty your heart of all things, and seek God continually in the depths of your soul. From thenceforward you will know what prevents you from uniting yourself with the sovereign good; you will discern even to the smallest atoms; you will see that the least useless pleasure, habitually retained, even though it should not be by a formed design, but merely from connivance; that curiosity in little things, familiarity with some persons, a glance cast upon some object unnecessarily, all superfluous care, are obstacles to the divine union." It is for this cause that S. Lawrence Justinian lived in his monastery with his religious, as if he had lived, said he, with

savages, and that Father Balthazar Alvarez maintained the same recollection as though he had been, he said, in the deserts of Africa. These figures of speech, which appear extravagant, show the effort that these Saints made to free themselves from all which could hinder their union with God.

Now it must be held without question, that whosoever, in things which concern God, does not carry his ideas even to excess, will never approach to Him; whosoever does not look upon all creatures as so many snares spread to make him fall, who does not combat the first impulses, as he would the wilful motions of sin; who is not affected by his imperfections as ordinary men are by their grave sins; who does not bewail his vanities as he would sacrileges; who does not chastise severely his faults of ignorance, of inadvertence, of surprise; will never attain to true compunction, and will never pluck up the evil by the root. We should maintain such a conduct with regard to those with whom we live, that while we are ready to give our lives for them, we should beware of them as of our greatest enemies. Otherwise we shall find that to live even with good people, will be for us an obstacle to our perfection. In short, it seems to me that the whole success of the holy work at which we labour, depends upon a disposition of the mind, which may be explained by the term *assiduity*. Without this assiduity, though on occasions we might perform the finest actions in the world, we should never remove the hindrances to our possession of the sovereign good. For to so remove them, we must, every day of our life, remember and put in

practice the things which help to draw us near to God, and must maintain the requisite dispositions for divine union. We know, for example, that to attain to it we must live in a great recollection of the senses; combat and conquer our humour and its natural inclinations; keep in good order the powers of our soul; be inwardly converted to our primary Source; lead a life detached from all creatures. Without all this we shall never enjoy the happiness of the divine union. We must then assiduously persevere each day in these dispositions; and if we content ourselves with being recollected an hour a day, giving full liberty to our senses during another hour; if we overcome ourselves in one thing, giving way to our nature in the others; or in short if we are not fully resolved to conquer ourselves in everything, we are not, I may say, even on the road which leads to the goal we aim at; and were we to live as many centuries as the primæval men, we should never remove the hindrances to the sovereign good.

But who is he that speaks to you? does he well understand what he tells you? Alas! Father, if you knew how badly I practise all this, you would greatly pity me! "*I expect always till the hour of my change come,*" till the Spirit who renews souls shall take from me my old rags, and clothe me with the rich ornaments of His grace. It seems to me that a good exercise for succeeding in this design, would be to pass our whole lives in preparing for the reception of those two divine gifts, which make up our happiness; namely, that during six months we should dispose ourselves by purity of heart and by fervent desires to receive

the Son of God at the feast of His Nativity, and during the other six months prepare in like manner to receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. By this practice, without doubt, these two divine Persons, the substantial gifts of God, who unite themselves to our souls by grace and by the Sacraments, will imprint themselves on our hearts, taking root there more and more deeply day by day, until they have reached the centre where the sovereign mystical union is accomplished. These are the honours, the riches and the delights, I wish you as a recompense for the charity you exercised towards that prodigal child, cousin of another prodigal child yet more wretched than he.

LETTER VIII.

To the same Father.

THAT HE CAN ENJOY NOTHING IN THE WORLD BUT JESUS CHRIST, AND THAT HOLY SIMPLICITY WHICH DEVOTION INSPIRES.—EULOGY OF TWO HOLY SOULS, MADAME DU VERGER AND MADELEINE BOINET. — IN WHAT PERFECT NAKEDNESS OF SPIRIT CONSISTS.

Marennes, August 4, 1654.

I simply cannot tell you the reason which has made me so long defer writing to you. Yet I think I ought to put forth some reason to excuse myself. Perhaps it may be that your letters are so short and so obscure, they do not supply me sufficient matter, on which to dilate in answer as I

would wish. But I will write when you please, that is, when you give me occasion for it, by a sincere communication of your good sentiments. Tell me them with simplicity, my dear Father, and say something to excite me to the love of Jesus and the contempt of the world, and to bind my soul more and more to yours by the sweet bonds of charity. I quite believe that you are no longer disposed to write polite letters full of pretty things. I assure you also that my own taste is extremely changed. Would to God that my life were so! Alas, I can no longer prize anything, nor enjoy anything but that affectionate simplicity, which inclines the heart to God and to divine things. All the rest wearies and pains me. What occupies me above every other thing, is the consideration of that ineffable gift God made to the world, when He gave to it His Son, the humble and meek Jesus. This favour is of so great and so precious a nature, that the consciousness of having received it ought to absorb all the powers of man, leaving him no power to remember, to esteem or relish anything but Jesus. At the sight of Jesus, all that is of nature seems to disappear; the mind becomes, as it were, stupid with astonishment, desiring to be wholly consumed with love for a thing so full of attraction. At the sight of this Incarnate God there remains to the mind no strength, but to lose itself in respectful gratitude before His feet.

I have been now for some time in a country place, far from the great world and its fashions, and from all that is polished in human life. This helps me much to enter into that simplicity which souls should have who wish to draw near to God.

If we preach, it is without artifice, and without those studied ornaments which great pulpits seem to require. If we converse, it is in simplicity, without any other view than to attract souls to God. In short, we have the advantage of being in a place, where nothing obliges us to act or to speak against simplicity. It must, however, be confessed that in this little spot great treasures of grace are to be found; I think divine Providence has led me hither to give me a deeper knowledge of the splendours of His greatness, at the same time that He makes me lose the view of the greatness of this world. It is not in myself that I discover these splendours of God's greatness, it is in the souls of others, whom He has marvellously enriched with His gifts, and in whom I can see, as through some little chinks, the light of the other life. I have already spoken to you of one of these persons who died soon after I knew her. I send you a little epitome of her sublime graces, so far as we are able to take account of them, and of the excellent dispositions of her inner life. These things are, however, nothing to the value of what we have since discovered in the writings she has left us.

There is another who is known but to very few persons. She gives me an account of all that takes place in her soul; and she has made manifest to me the innermost state of my own, so far as God had made it known to her. From this I have been able to see how admirable God is in His guidance, and in what manner we must walk in His presence, to be pleasing to Him. Thus, in this little town, far from studied conversations,

amidst an heretical and a rude population, our Lord gives me to find an intercourse, far sweeter than would be that of the court, or of the nobility, or of the learned men of the age. We speak here of the greatness, of the magnificence, of the goodness of God, "*of the treasures of knowledge and wisdom which are hid in Jesus Christ;*" of the most pure and perfect worship of God; of His merciful ways; of the practice of the evangelical counsels; of that true light which "*when It came into the world, the world knew It not;*" of the incomprehensible communication of Himself, which our Lord makes in the holy Eucharist; of the interior labours of the soul, and of all the things which deserve to occupy our thoughts in this life. How true it is that no one knows anything except when the unction of the Holy Ghost teaches him. For it is to a poor girl, simple, deformed, and despicable, according to the notions of the world, that these things are given. She has, however, a most pure heart, and a most enlightened mind, and an upright soul. To her, therefore, our Lord has confided these great talents of grace, because He has found in her a solid foundation upon which firmly to establish them.

This foundation is no other than an entire abnegation of all things, according to that parable of the Gospel, where Jesus Christ compares detachment from creatures to the sum of money necessary for undertaking a sumptuous edifice, and to the number of soldiers needful for making war. I should never have imagined, up to this I never knew to what utter nakedness of spirit God wills to reduce us, into what a desert He wills to lead us, in order to make us attain to the purity of His

grace. The soul must feel nothing of the things of this life, nor of her own operations; she must not even feel herself; she must be fixed in an obedience which upturns all her own impulses, good, indifferent, and bad; in a poverty which does not even leave her the free use of her faculties; in a purity which does not permit her to take pleasure in any created thing; that thus, stripped of all, and rendered, as it were, wild in this desert, she may become tame for God, and make herself familiar with Him. Having thus undergone a new birth, the soul has to return to the simplicity of her original nature, unrecognizable to herself and to others, having no longer life or motion, but to adore and to serve the God-Man, and Saviour of men. Him whom all indeed ought to adore, but the greater part of mankind know Him not, and those even who adore Him, oppose Him at the same time by a behaviour quite contrary to His own.

In this God has given us for our practice a thing by no means easy, commanding us to imitate His Son, and to lead a life quite opposed to that of the world. For as it is not possible so to live without shocking worldly persons by sentiments and maxims so contrary to their own, so it necessarily ensues that they repel us, and treat us as fools and extravagant men. God permits it so to be by a wise disposition of His providence, that, being rejected by creatures, and deprived of all the consolations of earth, we may be constrained to have recourse to Him and to seek in Him all our comfort and support. The being rejected by the world thus serves to confirm us in solitude of

heart, and makes us inwardly live among men as strangers, unable to accommodate ourselves to the fashions of a country, which we only look upon as a place of banishment. This being the state of affairs, the soul fortifies, establishes, and roots herself in God. She lives upon faith and hope, feeding on the truths she believes in, and on the sovereign good she hopes for. She dwells in a void, where she sees nothing sensible, but is as if she were suspended in the air, without any distinct object to behold; there, plunging herself into the abyss of faith, she is wholly lost in the thick darkness which God inhabits; not seeking the experience or enjoyment of anything, but reserving for the future all her pleasures. Still love engages her, fills her, and discharges her from all care. She recks not whether she is smiled upon, or men quarrel with her. If she is beaten, she feels it not; if she is caressed, it does not win her a whit. Neither promises nor threats can bend her. Nothing is capable of moving her, because she heeds not what is done to her, or what passes around her, ever attached to the object of her love, and thinking only of Him. This is the state I desire for you, Father, and in which I believe you to be established. This persuasion it is that makes me keep the thought of you. If I had it not, I should efface that thought from my memory, and disburden myself of it as unprofitable. But, considering you to be in this happy state, to which I feel sure grace has raised you, I take pleasure in conversing with you, and I hope that still more convenient occasions for communicating with you

may present themselves. I hope for such, when our Lord pleases, in whom I am, &c.

P.S.—When you write to the Marquis de Jonizac, I beg of you to induce him to perform a work of great importance for the service of God, it is to remove the preaching house of Jonizac, which is highly celebrated. He has the right to do so. The edict of Nantes allows Catholic lords of the manor to overthrow the preaching houses on their lands. No one can do it with more ease or more advantage than he. Several lords of Saintongue have done the like already, and it is the means of quietly destroying heresy.

LETTER IX.

To the same Father.

OF THE PERFECT IMITATION OF JESUS CHRIST.—CHARACTER OF THE EVANGELICAL LABOURERS.

Loudun, October 5, 1635.

The number of persons upon earth who seek God is so small, that I esteem it a peculiar blessing, when I meet any one who shows me that he wishes to belong entirely to God; I have recognized this good will in you, and this makes me very glad to receive intelligence of you, and I shall be most happy to do my part with you as well as I can. It is an astonishing thing to see with what love God devotes Himself to us, yet how few souls

think of Him. However, if we, who have declared war against the world, gave to God all that we could give Him, resting all our hopes in Him, then there would be something to console us in the grief we feel at the sight of so great a disorder. Let us then, Father, at least, who know Him and belong to Him by profession, make a generous effort to set our hearts at liberty, and render them capable of the royal function, to which He has destined us, namely, that of loving Him.

Among all the tributes which we can render to God, this one alone is worthy of Him. It is like a talent of pure gold which His most faithful subjects pay Him, and which is so noble and so excellent a thing, that no tongue can fully declare its value. But that talent, so precious, cannot be paid but by those, who have given up all the schemes which the human mind invents, remaining quite poor and destitute of all things. These persons have in their interior two very contrary dispositions. The one is a death fatal to nature, which strips it bare and separates it unceasingly from all the objects which it might desire; and the other is a life delicious to the mind, which, raises it to a pure love, makes it breathe even in this world the air of the beatific eternity, and introduces it into the sanctuary of that divine wisdom, whose delights are to converse with men. Oh! what a great glory these render to God by the perpetual sacrifice they offer Him interiorly, immolating and sacrificing themselves upon the cross which He Himself has prepared for them! What delight do they not give Him by

letting Him dispose of them completely, according to His designs, and by abandoning themselves unresistingly to His loving and wonderful operations! You must, I think, dear Father, be of the number of these chosen lovers, since you have the desire to be, and you are a member of a Company which is called to this eminent sanctity.

If we had no more exalted views than the common run of men, we should not embrace these high ideas of perfection. Therefore, we should regard nothing but Jesus Christ burning with love, who led such a life on earth that it was "*a scandal to the Jews, and to the Gentiles foolishness.*" It is the Spirit of this God-Man which draws man out of himself, out of his own schemes and his own interests, to devote him solely to God, inspiring him with the same sentiment, which made Jesus Christ say: "*My meat is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work.*"

A Jesuit who wishes to fulfil the duties of his vocation must entirely surrender himself to Jesus Christ, abandoning and losing himself in all possible things. It is thus that he will deserve the title of disciple of that Incarnate God, who came to establish upon earth a school of sanctity for men. But this Divine Master is listened to and despised. His doctrine and His maxims are condemned, although the knee is bent before His altars. Is it not a deplorable thing to see that He is rejected of His own, and that in these days we can scarcely undertake to be of His disciples without being the talk of the world; that a love so prodigious as He has shown us cannot win the hearts of those, who have given up all

the hindrances of the world, the better to love Him; that even they cannot be brought to true simplicity, to a tender and affectionate disposition of mind towards their adorable Saviour? So many subtleties, so many reflections upon everything, so much looking into the future, so many human considerations arrest us, embarrass us, and obscure our minds.

These are the things that prevent our seeing those brilliant lights of wisdom and of truth which are manifested only to the humble, and from tasting those delights of God which are abundantly communicated only to simple souls. Oh! what a difference there is between a mind void of self, annihilated at the feet of Jesus Christ, in absolute subjection to grace, and another full of self, and of its own sufficiency; that of a man who founds all his plans upon his natural talents, his acquired knowledge, his reasonings and his study! Yet how little is this difference known! Verily, Father, I am on the point of preaching you a sermon to entreat *you to dispose* yourself by the greatest possible self-abnegation for the reception of the gift of God's Holy Spirit, and of the new life in the soul, which His operation produces; but I must restrain my zeal. Excuse the liberty I have already taken. It is your charity which has made me use this freedom. I pray our Lord that it may please Him to unite your soul to His by the golden chains of His love, and by so many chains that it may never be able to escape from Him. If I can contribute in any way to this, I will do so with all my heart. Make use of me as though I were your slave. And so I will be in the

love of Him, who by His great might has enslaved us, that we might be servants of those souls, which He has redeemed from the servitude of sin. I take then this title of your servant, Reverend Father, added to that of your brother in Jesus Christ.

LETTER X.

To Father Leonard Frison, S.J.

BY WHAT STEPS WE CAN ATTAIN TO AN INTIMATE UNION WITH OUR LORD.

Your welcome letter has caused me as much joy as surprise. I did not expect this token of your friendship. All that I thought I could promise myself from it was, that you should remember in your prayers one, who has scarce a place in the memory of men, as being nothing any longer, and able to do nothing. It is a great gratification to me to perceive an opening in your soul for the introduction of my sentiments, which I have so much trouble in instilling into some others. I frankly confess to you, that though my voice scarcely ever utters them, I have at heart a very great desire to communicate them to all, because I believe they would be useful to all. But as I see you are so good, I take the liberty of telling you some things which may be of service to you for your spiritual advancement; they are things I

generally put before those souls of the same profession with myself, which are dear to me. It is not that I would assume the office of instructing anyone, but I do as a sick man does in an infirmary, who tells his fellow sufferers the remedies in which he has found virtue. I feel myself, indeed, more inclined to speak to you with full freedom, because I am thoroughly aware of the good dispositions of your heart. I find but one thing to censure in you, and that is the excess of the praises you bestow upon me. In this you are unpardonable, especially if you now decline to be ranked as a poet. Even the licence of poesy would not altogether excuse the words of your letter from being placed in the rank of temptations.

With this exception I consider you quite fit for the graces our Lord wills to bestow on you; the graces, namely, which He designs for the children of the Company in general, and for some particular souls in it. My desire then, for you, my dear brother, is that you may have a most familiar access to our Lord, and such a close intimacy with Him, by the continual meditation of His life, His doctrine and His sufferings, as to be wholly set on fire with love, a love which shall keep you inseparably united to Him. This kind of love S. Ignatius had, of whom it is related that he had Jesus Christ unceasingly in his heart and in his mouth, often bursting into tears through the vehement desire he had of seeing Him. I believe that if we only listened to His interior voice, and followed the sweet attraction of His Spirit, He would lead us into such a close union

with Himself, that we should think but of Him, speak but of Him, and, in fine, should feel Him living in us, working in us, animating and quickening us; governing our memory, ruling our imagination, instructing our intelligence, inspiring our will, and inflaming our heart with that celestial fire which He came to bring into the world. But to obtain so great and so sublime a favour, we must keep faithfully to the instructions which S. Ignatius has given us. The chief is to empty ourselves of all, entering into so great a solitude as regards the world and its creatures, as to resemble S. Xavier, who, as Father Ribadinïera relates in his life, in the midst of his greatest occupations, was as alone and as recollected in his interior, as a solitary might be upon the summit of a rock in his desert.

This utter stripping off of everything is the disposition of apostolic men, and S. Vincent Ferrer requires that we should have no more attachment even to the most necessary things, than if they were at the other end of the world. The second instruction calculated to lead us to this cordial union with Jesus Christ, is that which S. Ignatius gives us, when he desires that the chief study of each should be to seek in all things what is most mortifying. One applies himself to poetry, another to eloquence, another to theology, another to mathematics, and each one tries to excel in the particular branch of knowledge which he embraces. But the chief study of each one should be a thorough self-abnegation and a continual mortification in all things. This most high doctrine cannot be learned in the school of men, nor can it

be carried out into practice without our having a formed design of giving ourselves wholly to God.

The third disposition which binds us directly to our Lord, and makes us enjoy the closest embrace of His love, is that which S. Ignatius recommends so much, and which he calls a precious step in the spiritual life;—namely, that we should desire with all our might the state in which Jesus Christ appeared in the Judgment Hall,—when Pilate showed Him to the people;—His body all torn with the stripes of the whip, His head crowned with thorns, His face all disfigured, a reed in His hand, an old purple robe upon His shoulders, compared with Barabbas, set below that infamous wretch, and judged more worthy of death than he. This state, which the Son of God has embraced for love of us, and to give us an example, was a state of the general loss of all that could render Him considerable in the eyes of men; loss of honour, of reputation, of credit, of authority, of contentment, of peace, of life; a state of hatred, of rejection, of contempt, of abandonment; a state in which He reserved to Himself but the will of His Father and perfect obedience: a state which He has so ennobled, that we ought to love it and long for it as men commonly long for the staff of a marshal of France, a cardinal's hat, and the chief offices and dignities of the world; dignities which, when attained, are enjoyed as though they were the end of our creation. The love and desire for this state of annihilation is not according to the ordinary inclination of man. That is why S. Ignatius recommends his children so carefully to take heed

to this point of perfection, and to lay great stress upon it.

"*Let them seriously consider,*" *says he,* "*in the presence of our Creator and Lord, how important it is for our advancement in the spiritual life, to hold in abhorrence all that the world loves and embraces, and to embrace and desire with our whole strength, all that our Lord Jesus Christ has loved and embraced.*" But we content ourselves with regarding this as a fine idea, very good for elevating the mind, whilst we never strive in earnest to put it in practice. It is true that the attainment of this costs nature dear: but we are well rewarded for our labour and our pain, for we find ourselves soon brought thereby into an intimate friendship with Jesus Christ, we clasp Him in a close embrace, we take full possession of Him, we taste of His spirit, and have an astonishing familiarity with Him; we feel in ourselves strength and vigour for every kind of good, a generous determination for all the apostolic employments, a most pure intention for His glory, and an ardent zeal for the salvation of souls; we lead a heavenly life upon earth, and are satiated with those divine consolations, excess of which obliged S. Xavier to exclaim: "Enough, Lord, enough."

When our Lord had entered into S. Peter's boat on the shore of the lake of Genesareth, He first asked him to put out a little from the land, and after awhile ordered him to advance upon the open sea. Then they caught such a great quantity of fish that the net broke, and they so filled their two boats that they all but sank. This means that after our Lord has entered into a soul, and

she has, by His command, cut herself off from the things of earth; when, by a generous self-abandonment, she has allowed herself to be carried away by the Holy Spirit, just as those who, losing sight of land, sail with a fair wind on the open sea, then she is overwhelmed with so many graces and delights, that she cannot contain them; she is loaded with such a draught of heavenly treasures, that giving way under the weight of them, she sinks and loses herself in God.

This disposition S. Xavier found himself in, when he wrote, in one of his letters, that the abundance of the consolations, with which he was filled, made him weep so plentifully as to endanger his losing his sight. His Father, Ignatius, almost incurred the same loss from being unable to restrain his tears. It is this affluence of divine treasures which is imaged by the prophet, when he promises Jerusalem "that she will see the camels and the dromedaries of Media and Ephrata coming to her, laden with treasures; that the riches of foreign lands shall be brought to her, and that she will have in abundance all that makes the strength of nations." That is to say, that a faithful soul, who has entirely given herself to God, receives abundantly the treasures of grace and the foretastes of glory; that her labours are accompanied with benedictions and with happiness, and that she has admirable success in the conquest of souls.

But who can aspire to this happy lot? Mortified souls, detached from all things, perfectly free, who seek nothing in this world but Jesus Christ, who desire but Jesus Christ crucified, who love

Him purely and disinterestedly, losing sight of all creatures, and no longer even having regard to themselves.

You see, my dear brother, that I have ventured my boat far out. I have said more to you than I have yet said to any Jesuit. The goodness of your heart and your piety have made me abandon my sails to the breath of that Divine Spirit, whom I desire for my guide and for the primary spring of all my actions.

In Him, I am, &c.

LETTER XI.

To the same Father.

ON THE PROFESSION OF THE FOUR VOWS WHICH THE JESUITS MAKE.

Bordeaux, January 29, 1661.

The news I have received of your profession, makes me take the liberty of telling you in all simplicity the thoughts which I think are given me by our Lord upon your new position. I would speak to you of the sublime grade of the employments to which this state pledges you, and of the immense possessions, the riches and spiritual joys, which it promises you, and which you will have given you to enjoy, if it takes its full effect in you. When I consider you now in the new quality of a professed of the Company of Jesus, which you

have just received, I depict you to myself, Reverend Father, as having been placed in the disposition in which each of the disciples of our Lord found himself on the day of Pentecost, after they had been indued with power from on high. For, that which Jesus Christ then performed in a startling and miraculous manner in His first disciples, transforming them all at once by His Spirit, and filling them with His singular graces, He seems to me to perform now by the operation of the same Spirit, in the subjects of the Company, the day of their profession, after having disposed them for this grace during the retreat of their second Noviciate: so that if a professed of the Company corresponds faithfully to the designs of God and to the intentions of religion, he will be wholly indued and fortified with that spirit and that virtue, which S. Ignatius desired in each one of his children.

This spirit consists of two admirable dispositions. The first is a perfect abnegation, a true and solid humility, a sincere hatred of all that may be called the elements of the world, even to the finding an exquisite enjoyment in abjections and in contempt; in seeing ourselves repulsed, hated and persecuted, in passing for fools in the opinion of men, and in becoming objects of abomination to everyone: esteeming this our glory, through regard for Jesus Christ, and in consideration of His insults and of His Cross. Any one with this sentiment well established in his heart by the aid of a powerful grace, when bound to act for the glory of God and for the salvation of his neighbour, in the most toilsome labours, in the most trying circumstances, in the most difficult enterprises, and the greatest

risks, would feel himself animated with an interior strength; and this vigorous ardour would raise him above himself, to do and to suffer all. The second disposition is such a tender and ardent love for Jesus Christ, as to make His glory, His imitation, and His service, the only atmosphere in which we can breathe, whilst we cherish for Him an inviolable fidelity, and have an invincible courage for all that interests Him; a full confidence in His goodness, and a complete abandonment to His guidance, whether to submit to the dispositions of Providence, or to fulfil the commands of obedience. He who has arrived thus far, meets no more with anything which can trouble his joy and his peace; he sees nothing capable of grieving him, because he has no other desire nor other pleasure in the world, than to live a slave of the Cross of his Saviour, to be by Him sold and delivered up to all the souls, for whose salvation and perfection it shall please Him that he should labour.

This is the duty of a professed Father of the Company of Jesus; these are the virtues he must possess to discharge his employments worthily. I hold it for certain that an evangelical labourer who has attained to this degree of perfection, will receive from our Lord such an abundance of blessings, of light, of consolations and of joy, that his soul will not be able to contain them. He will be constrained to oppose the torrent of graces and of delights which fall upon him continually, and he will not be able to help saying, like S. Ephrem: "*Lord, moderate the excess of Thy favours; stay a little the profusions of Thy grace.*" He may

communicate of the superabundance of these spiritual riches to the souls he has to serve, so as to help them to grow more and more, in the knowledge and in the love of our Lord. God will make him feel that as He is incomprehensible in His power, in His greatness and in His richness, so also is He in His love and in His liberality. He will load him with gifts, He will open to him the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and will manifest to him by an experimental acquaintance, the truth of what S. Paul says of the inconceivable riches of Jesus Christ.

I know not what idea others have of God, but I simply tell you mine, and I assure you that I see no state in the world, nor any condition of life, in which the infinite bounties of the goodness of God and the sweetness of His love can be more palpably experienced than in the state and condition of a Jesuit, attached to Jesus, and pledged to the service of his divine Master by the vows of his profession, and by the duties and employments of his vocation. On this, then, I congratulate you, Reverend Father, wishing you the fulfilment of the promise, which our Lord has made to those who forsake all to follow Him.

In Him, I am, with all my heart, your, &c.

LETTER XII.

To the same Father.

OF AN UPRIGHT INTENTION.

Bordeaux, October 12, 1634.

Of all the points of the spiritual life, I see scarcely any more important than that of uprightness and purity of intention. What I am going to say upon this subject will take a somewhat peculiar turn, tending to lay open a general evil, that creeps even into our holiest actions, and upon the knowledge of which the reformation of our interior very much depends. I say, then, that an abuse, into which numbers of good people, who are not yet perfect, fall, is this, that when performing their actions, of which some are in themselves good, and others indifferent, they believe they perform them with an upright intention, under pretext that they offer them to God by an elevation of the mind, without, however, troubling themselves about the other dispositions which purity of intention requires. They persuade themselves that nothing else is wanted for this purity, but that the action should be offered to God, and that the matter of it be not bad.

Now, as they either expressly or virtually make this offering of all their actions to God, they flatter themselves that they are in full practice of an upright intention. I will let you see how much

they deceive themselves. The upright intention which leads to holiness should place in the heart, besides the elevation of the mind to God, a principle of purity rendering our actions perfect, not in their exterior matter, but in their inward form. I mean that our actions must proceed from a heart so perfectly turned towards God, as to shut out every low and vicious principle, not suffering any alloy of self-satisfaction, human respect, or other motive to enter, by which evil is allowed to creep into the action that we perform. Now I admit that these kind of intentions, which refer to God actions good or indifferent, by a simple thought, though nothing more perfect be added, are still pleasing to God. But I say, also, that remaining within these limits, they will never lead us to sublime perfection. God receives them, but they do not fully satisfy Him. He wills that our old man should die, that our natural spirit should yield to His supernatural spirit, in such sort of manner that it should be no longer we who live, but He who lives in us. Now the first kind of intention, of which I have just spoken, is incapable of destroying in us the life of Adam, or of raising us from our ordinary low manner of acting to one extraordinary and divine. Nothing but an upright and pure intention can effect this excellent result in us, can draw us out of ourselves to transport us into God.

It is an accepted truth in the writings of the Saints, that to be susceptible of the motions of God in all things, is to be dead to all the motions of the old man, and to all sentiments that are purely human. This is why S. Ignatius,

speaking of study, in his constitutions, charges his children to avoid that human and mean like for it, which ordinarily influences people to take it up. He desires them to be animated in their studies by the sole motive of the love of God, and of His greater glory. It will be said that we must like study. I grant it; but I maintain that it must not be with that liking which nature, if it is not well regulated, generally has for study. It must be loved with an affection all divine. We must apply ourselves to it solidly, but without giving way too much to a natural taste for it. On the contrary, this purely human enjoyment must be renounced. It is so incompatible with the enjoyment of God, that it insensibly weakens it, and at length extinguishes it altogether, leading the soul to a hardness and a miserable aridity, like that of the mountains of Gilboa. The necessity which perfection imposes upon us, of excluding from our motives of conduct any particular relish for the things to which we apply ourselves, that the fulfilment of God's will may be our sole motive, springs from the littleness of the human heart. Our heart is so small that it cannot serve two masters without prejudice to one of the two. It cannot contain within itself two objects, without one of them occupying less space than it would do if it were alone. Now we know that God requires our whole heart. Not only should the consideration of His love and of His will prevail over all other motives, and the enjoyment of Him over all other enjoyments, but He should be the sole principle of all our movements, the general motive of our actions. We cannot, then, receive any other motive

nor any other enjoyment than that of God, without diminishing something of that which we ought to give to God, and without dividing our heart between God and the creature. And, with regard to study, it is true that we ought to apply ourselves to it vigorously, and as much, perhaps, as the most studious among seculars; but we ought not to do so for the sake of any relish we have for it, but for the sake of God; that is, we ought to be excited to study, not by the love of study, but by the desire of serving God. I do not, however, contend, that it is necessary to stifle a certain innocent relish for intellectual things which God has attached to them, as well as to bodily meats, to make the use of them pleasant. I only maintain that we should purify by grace this taste for study, and so regulate it that the enjoyment of God absorbs it entirely. By this means a relish for study will not be prejudicial to us. In studying, our interior will be free; we shall not long for such and such a thing to be quickly over, that we may fly to study; we shall not omit our spiritual readings and our other exercises of devotion; we shall not perform them hurriedly to give more time to study; we shall not think that we lose the time we sometimes give to prayers. Fervour of spirit, love of prayer, the study of mortification, zeal for souls, will outweigh in our heart the study of the sciences. Otherwise, if we do not elevate our studies by these divine principles, we shall find ourselves dry and arid, full of distractions and of anxiety, eager, abstracted, hardened as to tears and compunction.

I call to witness those great speculators, those

men ever tied to their books, those intellects that have an insatiable avidity for learning; let them speak and frankly confess what takes place in their interior; let them tell us if it is not true that they have great difficulty in conversing with God, and that they feel scarcely any attraction or facility in the exercise of the divine love. Those among them who wish to defend themselves are accustomed to allege that God chooses them to be so; that their devotion is solid, and not soft like that of women; that one of their actions is worth more than a hundred others of common-place persons; and that besides, all their labour ends in God; that in teaching others, and in winning souls to our Lord, they forsake God for God. A signal error of those intellects which, ever choosing to dwell in themselves and in their meanness, make believe that they greatly honour God in that very thing in which they honour Him but very little, and in which perhaps even they displease Him.

They say further, in their own defence, that the service they render to God by their study is a purely spiritual service, and not sensible; that they yield up enjoyment and sweetness to feeble souls; that for themselves, by means of the science they have acquired, they have learned to serve God in a high and noble manner, and not as silly women; that thus they have nothing to add to their practice of looking up to God from time to time, and of making interior acts; besides, they are unceasingly engaged in employments most glorious to God, preaching, teaching, and occupying themselves in other good works. This senti-

ment of theirs, in the terms in which they express it, is a great illusion; for although what they do is good, it is nevertheless extremely low in comparison with that other perfect way of acting, of which they have not even perhaps the notion, and in the practice of which they have not made the very first step. Their interior acts, which they esteem so highly, are very often only acts of simple thought, which are in no way difficult, and have nothing very excellent about them. These kind of acts do not suffice for perfection; the heart must, besides that, be brought back to God, and filled with a love which so inclines the soul to God, that it rests but in Him, and mortifies itself in all its own pursuits. Now this is what they have never thought of in detail; and what they call supernatural enjoyments, which they leave to the devout sex, are not mere sensible tendencies, they are excellent fervours of the divine love, which, in God's favourites, possess not only the spirit, but the body also. From whence it comes, that the great saints are generally, excepting in certain conditions of trial, affected by divine things even to tears and to raptures, as is observed of S. Ignatius, of S. Xavier, of S. Philip Neri, and before them of S. Francis of Assisi, of S. Bonaventura, of S. Thomas Aquinas, and of so many others who had strong feelings about God, not only in the mind and speculatively, as those of whom I speak, but in the heart and in practice, being unable to find any satisfaction but in God, and raising themselves to God by sensible transports, at the sight of the smallest things, as a gnat or a blade of

grass. Such is the devotion, such are the consolations of the Saints.

But far removed from such devotion are they, whose whole communication with God consists of thoughts and some slight affections, which scarcely enter at all deeply into the heart. They place the service they render to God in the matter of certain exterior works, which really are good and honour God, but which do not raise men much in holiness, unless done with fervent dispositions and from a very pure principle. Now they will never practise them in this perfect manner, until they have passed through the exercises of an interior life, and become mortified, detached from all things. But this they have not done, and perhaps they have never even attempted to enter into this life of recollection. Perhaps they are even entirely ignorant of it. Pray you, dear Father, that you may enter into it very deeply. This grace I ask of our Lord for you.

I am, in Him, &c.

LETTER XIII.

To Madame Françoise de Foix, Abbess of Xaintes.

PRACTICES FOR INTRODUCING THE SOUL INTO THE INTERIOR LIFE.

Xaintes, December 25, 1632.

To satisfy the request you have made me of giving you in writing what I lately preached to you upon the practice a soul should observe that wishes to enter really into herself, I reduce it to three points. You may remember the discourse I gave to prove how important it is to us to establish ourselves in the interior life, and to pursue a conduct which, withdrawing us from without, leads us back into ourselves where God dwells. I will note down for you in abridgment what we ought to do to take up this line of conduct, and to strengthen ourselves in it.

First Practice.

To separate ourselves from all the entanglements which our heart might have with regard to things of this present life. To attain to this two things must be done. The first, must be carefully to observe the impulses of our heart, and ascertain to what they tend. The chief are, joy, sorrow, fear, and desire. Those things of this world,

which arouse these four passions in us are the tyrants which hold the place of God in our soul. We should try to find them out, and for this purpose ask the light of the Holy Spirit, and become attentive to what takes place within us. The second thing is, that after having discovered the objects of our attachments and of our entanglements, we must courageously apply our endeavours to get rid of them, mortifying in ourselves these four passions on every occasion upon which they arise, and opposing other contrary ones to them, founded upon the consideration of important and eternal objects. These objects we must often represent to ourselves, in order that through these representations we may be affected, sometimes with joy, sometimes with compunction, sometimes with fear, and sometimes with desire.

Second Practice.

To bind ourselves fast to God by a strict dependance upon Him, which consists in three acts, wherein we should exercise ourselves. The first is an abandonment, a resignation, a surrender of ourselves into the hands of God, confiding in His fidelity, and leaning entirely upon the guidance of His paternal providence, as children who have no other care than to please their father in all things. The second is a frequent oblation of ourselves to God, with a readiness to suffer all that it may please Him to bring upon us, exposing ourselves universally to be at the pleasure of all men from the consideration of the things to come. The third is an acceptation and consent to all

that God ordains or permits at present, with regard to us. These three acts bind our will fast to God.

Third Practice.

To proceed in matters of our spiritual life in an interior way, striving to be not only good people, but men of interior lives. For this two things are necessary. The first, to conform our life, not only to the law and will of God, as declared to us either by books or the voice of men, but also to that same law and will, which is dictated to us interiorly, in the depths of the soul, by the secret motions of the Holy Spirit, who presides in us as the supreme truth, and governs us by His instincts. We conform ourselves to this law and will by three operations.

The first, by consulting always in our actions the interior oracle, invoking God, asking counsel of Him, without letting ourselves be hindered or surprised by the human and inferior spirit, which, by its activity, continually slips in and introduces itself into all things. We must accustom ourselves to arrest it, and to mortify ourselves, in order that it may give place to the impulse of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, in obeying this divine Spirit with great respect and great fidelity, when we feel that He impels us interiorly to some good action, as for example, when He inspires us to mortify ourselves, otherwise He withdraws and abandons us.

Thirdly, in doing the things to which we apply ourselves, with a view to God, in a spirit of adora-

tion and love; so that we should not be occupied with what we are doing, but with God, who is present to us as the end and primary motive of our actions.

The second thing necessary to render our conduct interior, is to apply and to join what is most interior in ourselves to what is most interior in the things that we do. That which is most interior in us is the intention of pleasing God, the sincerest and the simplest, the deepest, the strongest that we can form. That which is most interior in the things that we do, is the solid good which is hidden in them, and which tends to eternity; as for example, when I obey my Superior, that which is most interior in my action of obedience, is that my Superior stands in the place of God to me; when I perform a good office for any one, the most interior part of this action, is that I see Jesus Christ in this person; not considering him either as my relation, nor as my friend, nor as being my countryman. When I pray to God, when I communicate, the deepest part in my prayer, and in communion, is that through these holy exercises my soul unites herself to God to do His will, and not that she there enjoys pleasures and sensible consolations. Thus, to lead interior lives, we must seek, by means of our most interior and deepest affection, what is most pure in each thing, and by this affection resolve upon it, and perform all our actions in this manner. Here then we have the means of rendering ourselves really interior and perfect; we must make use of them, and for this we require courage and fidelity, the

grace I ask of our Lord for you, Madame, and for your dear daughters.

I am, in Him, &c.

LETTER XIV.

To an Ecclesiastic who was preparing to take Holy Orders.

OF THE DUTIES OF A GOOD ECCLESIASTIC.

Learning your design of entering the ecclesiastical state, and of preparing yourself to take holy orders, I feel myself impelled by the zeal which I have for your good, to give you the counsels that I deem to be useful to you, to honour God in the profession that you embrace, and to attain the end which it proposes to you.

Let me then tell you, sir, that the principal point of this design is an upright intention, which requires that the ecclesiastical state should be entered only from a divine vocation, and from the sole motive of rendering service to God in it, without considering our own temporal interest. For it is the misfortune of the Church that those, who enter upon cures of souls and benefices, are generally drawn by family interest, and by the hope of endowments and honours. We must be called of God, like Aaron, by the sole motive of giving ourselves up to Him, and of becoming His agents and stewards, employing ourselves only in

that which relates to His glory, and the salvation of souls. There is no good in the vocation to the Religious life unless it proceeds from the Holy Spirit, and unless it is formed by grace in the heart of man. This is a truth of which all are persuaded. It is held to be an insupportable abuse to enter into Religion, with any other end than that of saving ourselves, and of serving God.

Now, I think it is not a less important undertaking to engage ourselves in the clerical office, and that it requires at least as powerful an operation of grace worthily to enter the ecclesiastical life as to enter the Religious life. The causes of the formation of Monastic institutions, have been the spirit of faith and grace, the consideration of eternity, the desire to be occupied only with God, and to be sheltered from the malice of the present world. This is what has peopled the deserts and filled Monasteries. The life of the Clergy is the institution of Jesus Christ, founding in His Church the priesthood, that is to say, an order and a state of persons destined to *purify, to illuminate, and to sanctify* souls by the ministry of the word of God and by the sacraments. Whence it follows that the amalgamation of the Religious life and the priesthood is most excellent, because the Religious life being no other than a means for living holily, and holiness being most suitable and even necessary to the priesthood, these two blessings joined together are a perfect state; and when they do not happen to be together, there remains always a strict obligation upon those priests who are out of Religion, to labour to acquire holiness. Their state requires all the purity of life of Religious

and of solitaries; and the priest who, to excuse the little care he takes of straining after the highest sanctity, should say, when he is spoken to about some point of perfection, as for example, of recollection, of prayer, of mortification, of zeal for the glory of God; that that is all very well for a Carthusian, for a Capuchin, or for a Jesuit, but that as for himself, he does not aim so high; such a one, I say, would greatly deceive himself. For although Christianity obliges generally all the faithful to a most sublime virtue, this excuse would nevertheless be more admissible in a layman engaged in the perplexities of business and in the cares of married life; but it is insupportable in a Priest or in any other Ecclesiastic; for so soon as we devote ourselves to the clerical state, we must prepare to strain after the most perfect divine union, the sacred ministry of the service of the altar requiring all the efforts a man can make to be intimately united with God. Therefore I would say to you, set before yourself all the good you would aim at practising, if you purposed to enter the most strict Religious order in the Church. And do not tell me that each Christian ought to aspire to this perfection and to this intimate union of heart with God. For, although that is true, and, in fact, we see in all states some persons who attain to this degree of holiness, it must nevertheless be confessed that if they do not attain to it, yet are good, and they keep themselves from great sins and scandals, they are still true and praiseworthy Christians.

But if an Ecclesiastic has not this perfection, there is a something deformed and monstrous in

him, and it may be said that his life is a disorder in the Church. And as we are scandalized by a Religious if he is not a man of prayer, recollected, mortified, detached from the things of earth, and we say he is not a true Religious, that he does not give great edification; so also, we have reason to be scandalized and to complain of an Ecclesiastic when he does not practice mortification, recollection, and prayer. I will tell you now my idea of what a man should be who pledges himself to the state which you are going to embrace. I will note down for you the duties of that state, from which no authority can ever dispense you; so that if you fall short of them, you will be extremely guilty.

The first thing, to which you must give your care, is purity of life, which consists in what our Lord commended, when He said in His first sermon: "*Blessed are the pure in heart.*" This purity of heart requires a continual care and self-watchfulness, to avoid all that is called sin: not only grievous sins, for all are agreed that such sins are heinous in a priest; but even slight sins, and all that disedifies, and passes for contempt of God; as the Apostle says, "*that we should do nothing but that which is true and sincere, that which is just, which is chaste and honest, which is righteous, which is holy, whatsoever is edifying and of good report, whatsoever is virtuous and praiseworthy in the discipline of morals.*"

I advise you, then, to begin your new life by an open war against venial sin; that is to say, against all that is bad, the evil of which is known, however slight that evil may be, and to enter upon a path which you must not at all look upon as im-

possible: namely, to take care to commit no faults, unless such as are committed by pure frailty, done heedlessly and without deliberation. I would assure you that, in the kingdom of God, there are souls that pass twenty and thirty years, without falling into any voluntary faults, and that have a settled habit of turning away from all that they recognize as evil. Never an intentional falsehood; never any deceit, nor anything which breathes of duplicity; they never displease their neighbour, unless from inadvertence.

We must here have recourse to the opinions of broad casuists, who subtilize, to maintain the rights of nature. This purity of heart, then, our Lord calls you to, in uniting you to His divine priesthood, and in giving you a vocation to the clerical state. He who lives differently has within himself, (though he often does not clearly perceive it,) a certain callousness, which, even although it does not come to be matter of mortal sin, darkens the heart, and creates in it so great an opposition to holiness, that so long as this hindrance remains, the very first step towards holiness will never be made. For this first step absolutely requires a firm and settled purpose of practising this kind of purity, which consists in not committing the slightest deliberate fault.

The second thing which I esteem very important for you, is the love of prayer. A priest should make a public profession of prayer, not only of saying the breviary, which the Church obliges him to do, but also of making mental prayer; that is, of taking a regular time for thinking of divine things, for meditating upon the law

of God, and for making requests to Him; remaining, for this cause, near Him, and taking pleasure in speaking to Him, and in being occupied with the consideration of the eternal truths. I hold, indeed, that an Ecclesiastic ought to meditate day and night upon the law of the Lord, and at all times turn over some good thought in his mind. To be a man of prayer, all the employments which do not tend to God must be put aside. Those Churchmen, who amuse themselves by amassing money, by going to law, by shuffling ways, or by saving for any other end than that of almsgiving, I believe to be in great danger of being ill-received by Jesus Christ at the hour of death. The Churchman is a man of God; that is to say, his affairs are the affairs of God. If he minds anything else he belies his ministry. "*None of those who have enrolled themselves in the militia of God,*" says S. Paul, "*encumber themselves with the offices of the secular life.*" Every priest who hoards, and who wishes to amass riches for any other end than for the help of the poor, or for the adornment and good of the Church, is most dangerously disordered in mind.

From the spirit of prayer springs a complete detachment from the world and from all creatures, which is the third thing necessary for an Ecclesiastic. He ought to be, like the Levites of the old law, separated from the rest of men, who, in comparison with him, are profane; his demeanour should be that of a man free from all interest, and attached to nothing of earth. The affairs and interests of God are his only occupations and the sole objects of his care. They belong

more directly to him than to the most secluded Religious, who are not priests, because separation from temporal things is with Religious a matter of choice and study, but with a priest it is his condition. Resolve, then, in giving yourself to God and to the sacred ministry, to have no longer any affection but for the serving of the altar, and the profit of souls. These things ought to work in you such a perfect detachment from all perishable things, as not only to cause you to give to the Ecclesiastical functions all the time they require, but to make you also apply yourself to them with an entire liberty of heart, and a perfect nakedness of spirit. Thus only will you gain grace to fulfil that great law of God, which commands us to *love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength,* and afterwards be able to teach others to serve Him. Without this detachment and this freedom of heart, you will never be capable of speaking efficaciously to others, or of persuading them to virtue.

This detachment should appear in all things, and even in the remunerations which you receive for the services which you render at the altar. You should receive them in a spirit so generous and so detached from money, that all the world may know that you content yourself with what the devotion of the people inspires them to give you, exacting nothing more. We see, even among lay persons who receive emolument from their profes sions, and who subsist upon it, that there are som so honourable and of such disinterested virtuo that they take only what people are pleased give them. There are to be found lawyers and

physicians, who have the reputation of being free from avarice, who live disinterestedly, and are not like some others, greedy of lucre, and famous for taking care to be well paid. It is much more becoming for priests than for persons of any other class, to act in this manner; I do not say with regard to the revenue of their benefices, but in what concerns the actual and daily remunerations, which they receive for their ministrations. And certainly it is difficult to understand how, if they are solidly devout and men of prayer, they can show as much anxiety for augmenting the profits, which proceed from their functions, as the state ministers do for raising their taxes higher day by day. I have lately become acquainted with a countryman of yours who, although he had simply neither patrimony nor benefice, was yet resolved to take nothing for the particular services rendered to souls, nor for the exercise of his functions. He was also a very interior man. God has no long while since removed him from this world. It is true that in him this thing was an exercise of perfection which displayed an extraordinary detachment from the world. But I venture to say that whosoever shall have the like generosity, will never want for anything. God is too faithful ever to abandon those who thus abandon all for love of Him.

But how few there are who have courage enough to attain to this! *Who is he? tell us, and we will praise him.* I assure you, that perfect detachment from temporal possessions is a thing so rare in this world, that one knows not where to find it. For the best persons, of whose

goodness we judge from their state and profession, are not exempt from this universal love of money, so that those who do not place their hope and their support in it, nor lean upon it, may have a good right to pass for Saints.

Numberless reasons are found to excuse this passion for money, and to justify the intrigues made use of to obtain it. Each is ingenious in this matter, and only the light of God can show that the reasons and excuses urged are false pretexts, and not true reasons or legitimate excuses. If you are exempt from this stain, as are all really spiritual persons, you will be precious in the eyes of God, esteemed and blessed by men, and cherished by the Angels and Saints of paradise, which is the only happiness to which you should aspire. If God sends you any property, receive it as a means of performing good works and to relieve the poor; but never make your abundance serve to your own comforts. This is the spirit of the Saints. I desire it for you as being alone proper effectually to determine you to that form of life, which I propose to you. I will now relate to you, as an example on this subject, a history which I have already introduced in another work, destined, perhaps, one day to be given to the public. God has put His fear before our eyes as a barrier to prevent us from inclining to evil, and, from time to time, He exhibits the effects of His justice in a manner capable of imprinting this fear deep in the heart. When priests and the faithful servants of God have well graven this fear on their souls, then they should draw near to God by love,

and by a love which establishes in them a perfect confidence in God.

I know, for a certainty, that three years ago, in this province of Guienne, a priest being at night in bed, alone in the house, belonging to a living that he possessed, heard so horrible a noise near him that he was frightened at it to such a degree, that his sheets were saturated with his sweat. Being in this affright, he heard a voice by his bedside, which said to him: "Fear not, I am the soul of thy brother, the priest who possessed this living before thee, and who lived in this house. I am damned, and God has sent me for thy instruction, that thou mayest beware of falling into the misery in which I am. The two-thirds of priests are damned for three crimes: for avarice, for impurity, and for revenge. Those lowest in hell are priests, and next lawyers. I am in a very sorrowful place, where I do nothing but weep." The conversation was longer, but I only know what I have just narrated. Now, although these kind of apparitions and revelations are not articles of faith, I nevertheless believe this one to be a true case, partly because I learnt it from a good man, who heard it from the original person, and partly on account of certain circumstances of the place, and things that there took place, which it is not now necessary to relate.

God pursues a very hidden conduct with men. He acts thus by a wise disposition of His providence, to give occasion to the merit of our faith. He, nevertheless, from time to time, in all centuries, and amongst all nations, causes examples and experiences to flash upon us, which render the

truths of faith so sensible, that we are, as it were, forced to receive them; and it is a strange blindness to act as do those freethinkers, who avoid, as much as possible, being convinced by miracles and the other extraordinary things, which theologians call *motives of credibility*. For myself, I believe that the truths of faith are sometimes rendered manifest by proofs of this kind, which are so startling and so solid, that they cannot reasonably be resisted. I hold those happy, who have the humble docility to believe such things, and those unhappy, who obstinately reject them, and delight in persuading themselves that what they are told is false. This obstinacy proceeds from the desire they have of remaining free to follow their errors, and their irregularities. We must take care to avoid this intellectual pride, and have no difficulty in believing whatever is conformable to the sentiments of the Church, and moreover sufficiently authenticated. What I have just related to you is, in my opinion, beyond a doubt, and the conclusion I draw from it is, that if priests do not strive with great diligence to keep themselves united with God, living in the world, deprived of the aids which are to be had in well-governed Monasteries, they easily fall into slothfulness and blindness. By these they are driven headlong into grave sins, of which, having afterwards contracted the habit, they come at last to a callousness almost irremediable, on account of their unworthy participation of the Sacraments.

I beseech our Lord that He may keep you in His holy protection, and that He may incessantly arouse you by His grace, so that you may not

slumber in this misery. He will do it, if you try to practise the three things I have noted down for you in this letter.

LETTER XV.

To the Abbe de Vaux.*

Bordeaux, this 8th day of February, 1657.

I have often much regretted being unable to answer so many letters which I have received from you. But for twenty years I have been powerless to do so. A short time since our Lord restored to me the facility of writing, and I purposed immediately employing it, in opening my heart to you, with that full freedom, which you are pleased to allow me. Let me then tell you, that it seems to me that you ought to make prayer your great work with its accompaniments; which are a continual recollection of mind, and an intention always directed towards God: so that you should undertake nothing which is not for His service, but make His service your sole occupation. I consider that you should be a man of God, that is to say, a man devoted to the things of God alone,

* M. Lanier, Abbé de Vaux, was a man of singular merit, very enlightened in the spiritual life, with a peculiar talent for direction, and with great zeal for all enterprises which concerned the glory of God. He was archdeacon of Angers and *official* at Paris. His friend, who wrote this letter to him, gives him excellent advice for his guidance.

who neither takes pleasure nor satisfaction in anything else; for even the necessities of life have some reference to God, and enter into His service. When we leave the occupations which concern the service of God, we must go and rest in the bosom of God, I mean in prayer; and there, collecting our powers, employ them in honouring, in revering, and in loving this Sovereign Master. We should begin always by the examination of our state, of our faults and of our evil dispositions, humbling ourselves for them at His feet, and accusing ourselves to Him with an ardent desire to satisfy His justice. It is in prayer we must get that recollectedness, which we must afterwards everywhere preserve; failing this our mind would soon find itself straitened and powerless. When we have thus collected ourselves in prayer, we are strengthened to walk in the way of God, and are made capable of undertaking fresh works for His glory. But, in order to obtain the grace of prayer, and strength to persevere in it, mortification is absolutely necessary. First and chiefly interior mortification, which moderates all the impetuosities of the soul, except those proceeding from the Spirit of God, and these need merely to be accompanied by discretion. In the second place, exterior mortification, which represses the riotousness of the senses, and causes the body to suffer some pain. It is inconceivable how much this voluntary severity which we exercise against ourselves, wins the favour of our Lord. I am not of the opinion of those spiritual persons who make account of interior mortification only, and who say that all these kind of exterior things are of little

consequence; for myself, I consider it beyond doubt that there has never been fervour of spirit without penance. I say more: the sweetnesses and consolations of prayer go pairs with the mortifications of the body. It is in this that we greatly deceive ourselves, and our mistakes upon this head are but too common. But, besides these things, I believe that to render a perfect service to our Lord, you must unceasingly aim at His glory; always speak of God, always act for God, which will attract towards you His inward working; just as it is with nurses, to whom milk comes in proportion as they give it to their nurslings.

To treat always of that which may contribute to the advancement and salvation of souls, is what makes men perfect. It is also a great advantage to have to direct the interior of souls that desire to attain perfection, or that are bound by their state to attend to it. Do not admit into your heart any affection but for what relates to the honour and interest of God; but in doing so, have purely the interest of God in view, and by an upright intention keep your mind ever attached to God, not suffering it to abase itself to earthly considerations, to desires of pleasing men, or fears of displeasing and not satisfying them. In a word, the heart must be set free, so as neither to consider, love nor fear anything but God. One who is really penetrated with these views, will not commit faults contrary to prudence; for the Spirit of God is wise, and suffers no imprudence in those He animates. Now whosoever has this faithful design of pleasing God, and regards Him in all things, is assuredly animated and led by the Spirit

of God. In fine, it is thus that true pure love forms itself in the heart; it is thus, also, we attract that heavenly fire which makes man quite supernatural; he is no more the slave of nature, nor of the world, he is the true freed man of grace.

I cannot help saying a word to you of what relates to myself; I have been for twenty years in strange troubles and very great contrarieties. It is now two years since our Lord began to re-establish me in peace, and to fill me with joy. My strength is renewed, and I hope I shall be rendered capable of doing service to God outwardly. I am, nevertheless, still straitened, being unable to exert myself about anything, unless in my room. The last three months I have written a great deal; but I have only began to write letters a fortnight or three weeks since. To return to yourself, I beseech our Lord to make you a man entirely after His own heart, that is to say, to complete His work in you, detaching you wholly from yourself, and set you at perfect liberty, in a state in which you may render Him a service pure and worthy of Him. I know no other road which leads to God than that which I have just traced out for you. Time passes, and we are soon to appear before Jesus Christ, who will show Himself suddenly to us when we depart this life. If He finds our souls in a good state, oh! what a welcome! what joy! If, on the contrary, He finds them in a bad state, alas! what a meeting! what desolation! The holy apostles prepared the early Christians for the advent of Jesus Christ.

This thought should never be absent from our mind.

Paper fails me, I must conclude, assuring you that I am, &c.

LETTER XVI.

To the same.

IN WHAT THE GOOD DISPOSITION OF THE SOUL'S INTERIOR CONSISTS, AND SOME OTHER COUNSELS.

March 18, 1657.

I received your letter of the 23rd of February, yesterday, through the Prior of Vaux. In all that you write me about *yourself*, I see nothing which does not appear to me to be good. But let me tell you that the principal and most important thing our Lord expects of you, is the regulation of the interior, which seems to me to consist in three points. The first is a gentle and peaceful attention of God, which is formed in us, and becomes habitual in us by frequent returns of the soul upon herself, joined with the remembrance of our Lord. The second is an habitual composure of the powers of the soul, by cutting off all idle thoughts and vain affections, and by mortifying all that opposes purity of heart, and prevents in consequence the intercourse of the soul with God, and the infusion of the divine light, of which she stands always in need. The third is the perpetual practice of resignation and submission to God,

with a readiness upon all occasions to apply ourselves to His service and to what is for His glory. This introduces the soul into a constant intercourse with God; because God, seeing her so disposed, gives her occasions to do the good that He desires of her, and assists her in doing it. What we should carefully observe in the practice of these points, is to purify our intention unceasingly, disengaging it from all the seekings of self-love, and raising it to God; not flattering or conniving at its natural inclinations, which often, in those who do not use this diligence, carry the day. I do not think that for our spiritual advancement anything is more important or of more weight than this uprightness of intention and this putting away of all our own interests. If we do not mistrust the artifices of self-love, arming ourselves with a holy severity against its caresses, we are in danger of being often surprised and conquered by it.

Take care that the good you do to your nephews be founded rather upon charity than upon natural considerations and human affections; and, in all things, generally, only look to God, protesting to Him unceasingly in your devotions, and at the altar, that you wish to belong absolutely to Him, and that you seek for nothing in the world so much as to know His holy will, and to know in what you can render Him the most service; tending always to that end, and suffering no other view to enter your mind. It is of more moment to establish and to maintain ourselves in this interior disposition, than to do many good works. These latter are nevertheless useful to the progress of the spiritual life, if we do not incline to them,

because we cannot endure solitude, but must go out of ourselves.

It is important to make frequent retreats, even though they should be but of a few days duration. By so doing we draw near to God, so as to be enlightened by His grace, and to advance in divine union. When the soul dreads solitude and shuns recollection, it is a sign that the interior is very weak, and that the exterior predominates. From thence come darkness, blindness, and illusions in the practice of virtue. There is nothing better than to maintain a simple, pure, and disinterested conduct towards God, doing always what we judge to be most for His glory, and what is least to our liking, what is most contrary to our own feelings. I believe that a man who has a real desire to advance in perfection, never abandons himself to dissipation when he can avoid it, but that with a Religious cheerfulness, with frankness and freedom of mind, he speaks to each one of God, and of the means of serving Him well, without being kept back from so doing by human respect, or by that timidity, which the inclination of the minds of those with whom we converse, generally causes in us. So soon, however, as he returns to retirement and rest, he goes straight to God, and not to his own gratifications, in order to keep himself ever in the pure region of the spirit, above sense and nature.

This watchfulness is necessary, and the means of maintaining ourselves in it is, to walk with the eyes ever attentive to what is good. By marking the sacred sources whence grace comes to us, we get strength to do all things holily; and to have

recourse often to these sources is very great wisdom. Some are helped by solitude, some by spiritual intercourse, others by penance. Each one should seek help from that which aids him most. I beseech our Lord, that at your present age,* which is the same as that at which S. Francis Xavier died, He may give you the vigorous disposition of mind of that holy apostle.

LETTER XVII.

To the same.

HE EXHORTS HIM TO CULTIVATE THE TALENT HE HAD FOR SPEAKING OF GOD IN CONVERSATION, AND TO CUT AWAY THE PLURALITY OF HIS BENEFICES.

Bordeaux, August 25, 1657.

In answer to your letter of the 25th of April, let me say that, though it be true that, at your age of fifty-four years, the thought of changing your exterior manner of life is not a likely one; yet for the interior, I do not see what you can do better for your own advancement, than to employ yourself much in helping others, by speaking to them of God with the relish which He gives you to feel in this holy intercourse.

* In this remark he follows the mistaken idea of those who fancy that S. Francis Xavier died at the age of fifty-five. It has been since discovered that he was only forty-six and some months when he died.

It appears to me that He thereby sufficiently points out to you, that He wishes you should procure His glory, by your conversation with your neighbour, and that you should, for love of Him, overcome the weariness and disgust which you feel in it. Your age, your rank, and your office, always authorize the service you in this way render to God, and you experience, I am sure, the truth of that maxim: "*Give, and it shall be given unto you.*" Thus nurses of the children of princes are treated delicately, for the sake of their nurslings. As to those frequent communications with people of the world, if you cannot curtail them in any way, and you make them profitable, they cannot reasonably be found fault with. With regard to your benefices, no doubt it is always a good thing to make the necessary reparations; and since you have already disburdened yourself of some, why not draw still nearer to the holy custom of the Church, which, during more than a thousand years, allowed but one benefice, provided that one sufficed for the maintenance of the incumbent. I end by thanking you for the trouble, which you would have taken about the printing of the *Spiritual Catechism.* This book was only lost to me, owing to the readiness, with which I gave copies to some pious persons, who put it into the state in which you saw it. The other parts of the work are at Loudun, in the hands of Mother Jane of the Angels. I am now writing another, as a useful recreation. In kind it is much the same as the *Catechism,* but the form of it is a little different. I treat in it of the ways of perfection, beginning with the desire, which must

first be bad for it. However, to speak to you my present state, I can exercise my mind w more ease and liberty, but if our Lord would pleased to set me entirely free, I should be g that you should entreat Him to do so by your h sacrifices. I beg of you to do it.

Your J. Jos. S.

I forgot to tell you that I have seen the Prior Vaux. It has been to me great satisfaction. shall be very glad to see him in my room, when likes to come, and shall take pleasure in doi him any service I can.

This letter was written by the hand of anothe He added with his own hand:

When it shall please our Lord to give me t power to write with my own hand, I shall use with extreme joy, to communicate with you, a unfold my thoughts to you from my inmost hea

LETTER XVIII.

To M. Pouget, Priest at Tulle.

THAT WE MUST SO EMPLOY OURSELVES IN THE SERVICE OF GOD, AS TO LEAVE NO BLANK IN THE COURSE OF OUR LIFE.—EXPLANATION OF A PASSAGE OF BLESSED JOHN OF THE CROSS, RELATING TO PERFECT NAKEDNESS OF SOUL.

March 7, 1656.

I have received two of your letters, which have acquainted me with what I wished to know about your state and your employments. I bless our Lord for the grace He has given you. I wish you a continuance of fervour in prayer and a perpetual intention of doing nothing but what is for the glory of God, giving no place to any other thing. For, unless we do take care so to conduct ourselves as to leave no void in the course of our life, all our occupations being bound tight, and pressed together, our soul insensibly falls into a weak, slack sort of way, which can only be remedied by great labours. We must then ever keep an attentive watch, not to suffer our heart to amuse itself with any creature whatsoever, so acting as that all we do may be filled with God. *Ut impleamini in omnem plenitudinem Dei.* Father Tillac can send you, from the place where he is, what you desire to have of my writings; he is nearer to you than I. Write to him, therefore. I shall be very glad that whatsoever good is to be found in them should

be communicated to you. You are happy in wishing for no other profession or riches in this world, than to render service to our Lord. I must tell you that I have found, in Father John of the Cross, the proposition, about which we were disputing. It is true that he says in one place that the soul should obtain *to have no graces of sweetness and of consolations, and other like extraordinary favours.* But I think that that only relates to souls perfect in the love of God, who have already received a quantity of such graces, and who, wishing to place themselves in a complete nakedness of spirit, reject all that is not of pure and naked faith, because it burdens them. But those who have not yet vigour enough to walk in this very pure way, ought not to reject the help of the graces, which God offers them, to animate and strengthen them in the execution of His designs. Besides, the strength of the elevation which the Saints have from God, when they receive these extraordinary favours, does not allow them to make reflections about rejecting them, but makes them proceed simply, without subtilizing so much. Moreover, there are souls which, in the first beginnings of their spiritual life, are greatly helped by these kind of graces to increase in divine love. It is true also that he who rejects them from pure affection for God, and from a sincere desire of pleasing Him the more, by depriving himself of them, will derive great profit from this detachment, as desiring God alone, who is all in all to Him.

I am, in our Lord, &c.

LETTER XIX.

To the same.

AN EXHORTATION TO THE WORK OF MISSIONS, TO RECOLLECTEDNESS, TO DETACHMENT FROM WORLDLY THINGS, AND TO FERVENCY.

May 4, 1658.

I felt extreme joy in reading your letter, seeing the employment our Lord gives you for the salvation of souls. I hope that you will not only find a great relish in it, but that you will also from it derive great profit, and that you may learn by experience that one tastes quite a different kind of meat, in the functions of the mission, from that received in the direction of devout souls. M. Friquet will have sent you in advance a manuscript, which had remained in my hands. Father Tillac will send you the rest when you like.

There is no better preservative against the attacks of the devil, than to keep our vessel so well calked that the water cannot get in; I mean to say, than to keep our heart perpetually on the watch not to admit into it any taste for worldly things, no attachment to what is temporal, no self-seeking, but to shake off the dead weight of its natural cowardice, by means of the aids with which you are acquainted. Then divine charity takes its place to the very full in the heart, according to what S. Vincent Ferrer excellently

says: "*Where charity fills the whole soul, there is no room left for vanity.*" When this charity has become habitual in the soul, it sets her all on fire. A man thus disposed finds his nourishment, and an intimate communication with Jesus Christ, in the participation of the holy Eucharist, from whence proceeds the happiness of the heart and the fervency of the divine love, filling the whole soul. She finds all her good in Jesus Christ, and all her happiness in the delights of the heavenly love. This love cannot be wanting to the man that has left all to have Jesus Christ, who gives Himself to him in His sacred feast. With regard to that good widow lady, of whom you spoke to me, I must tell you plainly that the dispositions of heart, you mentioned to me, cannot but be displeasing to our Lord. As to what relates to her poor little child, alas! I embrace it with all my heart, and, kissing its little hand, I beseech our Lord to grant him the abundance of His divine mercy. The child is already as dear to me as if he were my own son. May He who created him work in him according to His divine charity. I earnestly entreat Him to do so. Follow the attraction of the grace which inspires you, as to what is to be done for him. I quite agree with it, and I unite myself with you, lifting up my hands to God for the good of this little creature. I advise you to make a Novena to S. Joseph, and to put upon the affected part of the child some paper, which has touched the holy Unction of Loudun.

I am, &c.

LETTER XX.

To the same.

HE EXCITES HIM TO THE LOVE OF CROSSES AND OF AUSTERITIES.

June 30, 1659.

I had written to you last week, but God has permitted my letter to go astray. I have received yours, in which you tell me of your mission. I wrote you word that Father Poncet complains of not having received any of your writings from you. He wished to have the mistakes of the *Spiritual Catechism*, and the letter about the meeting we had with that holy young man, upon the road from Rouen to Paris. You can send them to him at his brother's, Counsellor of the Court of Aides, Rue d'Anjou, Paris.

I have since received another of your letters written the day of Pentecost. That day I was upon the cross. You can do as you judge expedient in favour of those poor sick people. I send you word that the cross was a fit place to receive the Holy Spirit, because suffering is an excellent disposition for grace. I consider that a faithful soul should always keep herself disposed to suffer; never allowing herself to seek the gratifications of nature, so as to lean upon them; she should be persuaded that ill-treatment, and a state in which she must always be doing violence to

herself, are very profitable. And, indeed, when sufferings are wanting, she should procure them for herself with discretion; for it is most hurtful to a generous heart to take its rest and contentment in those low and earthly things, which flatter the senses. We often do so, however, without scruple, because we see no harm in it. But the Spirit of God inclines us to rouse ourselves in labour and in trouble, so as to draw down from heaven fresh flames, and a greater fire of love into our hearts. It is true that a little rest should sometimes be given to nature, and that our Lord wills us to use this indulgence, in order that He may the more easily communicate Himself to the soul, and the more sweetly shed His graces upon her. But of ourselves we should have an inclination for all that raises us above ourselves, and our delight should be in the cross and in sorrows.

I feel more and more confirmed in this idea, because our misery and our corruption cannot be better healed than by this remedy. Besides, experience shows that the less man spares himself, the more God caresses him, provided that in persecuting the body, he does not, by his indiscretion, choke the mind; but we are rarely subject to fall into this excess. Let us, then, boldly unfurl the sails of our heart to the breeze of the Holy Spirit, to receive His stirring impulse, when He inclines us to suffer and to humble the flesh.

I pray the Holy Spirit to crown you with His graces.

LETTER XXI.

To the same.

THAT TRULY SPIRITUAL PERSONS CUT OFF ALL THAT IS NOT OF GRACE, OR ACCORDING TO SOUND REASON.

July 6, 1657.

It is time to answer your last letter of the Feast of Holy Trinity. If our Lord gives an opportunity of serving the young man you recommend to me, I will do so gladly. I send you a book of our spiritual hymns, which has been lately printed. The *Catechism* is being printed at Paris, but very slowly. The direction of all things must be left to our Lord. A way of acting, most conformable to wisdom and to truth, is to trust all our schemes to God, putting away the eagerness which would deprive us of our peace. This eagerness proceeds from our seeking some other interest than that of God. The interest of God often urges us to actions for His glory, and strongly affects us; but it is peacefully and without returns upon self. We want, therefore, courage and constancy to mortify all our eagerness and activity, until our soul be affected by the one only motive of God, grace alone living and reigning in us. We ought to be tending incessantly to this grace, this one grace, I mean, which can only be obtained when what is in nature and for nature is extinguished. The life of nature becomes known only when we

give ourselves to prayer and interior recollection; otherwise we know it not, nor have we even the suspicion of its not being good. Men, for the most part, scarcely distinguish what is good from what is indifferent; and they call *good* all that does not appear to them an *evil*.

Spiritual persons, however, see an infinite difference between what is good and what is indifferent. In themselves, they permit nothing but what is good; and without being troubled or scandalized by things indifferent, they take great care to prevent anything vain and empty from creeping into their life. Whatever is not of God, what does not tend to God, what has not God in it, is vain and empty.

Thus the faithful servants of God banish from their heart all those natural impulses which arise every moment within us, and which proceed neither from grace nor from sound reason. They cannot endure any motives but what are divine; they stop all the rest. By these means the life of grace is acquired. This life our Lord favours with the gift of the Holy Spirit, dwelling in us. This Divine Guest it is, who raises us above all the littlenesses of this wretched life; who unceasingly cuts away all the disorderly and unprofitable products of our corrupt heart; He it is who heals all those languors of self-love, which cause us to be ever falling back upon ourselves, and render our life laggard and our soul cowardly.

The real reason why there are so few fervent souls is, that there are few, who have the courage to cut off these unprofitable things. Fervent hearts suffer nothing but God in themselves, and

are never satisfied unless they are in God, acting for God, uniting themselves to God, either by that relish of God which engages them within themselves, or by some generous design that they form for His glory, or by some holy action done for His service; or, again, by some battle they wage for the subjection of nature, or which they sustain against the devils for the defence of His interests. Finally, they so watch over themselves as never to foster any passion or desire within them, which tends to other end than the eternal good; or, at least, to some temporal good for the sake of the eternal.

In practising this vigorously and assiduously, the supernatural life is acquired, to which the holy Gospel and the epistles of the blessed Apostles exhort us, and the examples of all the Saints draw us on. To this blessed life I beseech our Lord unceasingly to guide you, and to make your heart aspire to it.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXII.

TO THE MARQUIS DE FENELON.*

Bordeaux, May 17, 1662.

The departure of M. Villars gives me opportunity of writing to you, and your goodness encourages me to take this liberty, since you have been pleased to manifest to me in your last letter the disposition of your heart for the service of God. It is that which determines me to converse frankly with you upon this subject, when our Lord shall give me an opening. To-morrow is the Feast of His Ascension, which prepares us for another still greater Feast, that of Pentecost. The Ascension is the greatest for our Lord, and Pentecost the greatest for us. We cannot sufficiently rate the high importance to us of the coming of the Holy Spirit into this world, since, without the pouring forth of this Divine Spirit in our hearts, we should be ever grovelling and sensual, incapable of the supernatural life. But how opposite is this supernatural life to the life of the Court! How contrary is the spirit of the Court to the Holy Spirit! This latter inspires a pure, straightforward, simple, all holy, conduct. That the former, even when criminal in its conduct, gene-

* This was a gentleman of unusual virtue and merit, with whom he was familiarly connected. He exhorts him to shun the charm and the illusions of the court, and to give himself up to God altogether.

rally behaves with a certain haughtiness, and insensibly involves the heart in certain ways of acting which are greatly opposed to the purity, the straightforwardness, and to the simplicity of the Spirit of God. One of the most dangerous illusions of the spirit of the Court is, that it falsely enlarges and diminishes objects, making them greater or less, so that that which is important passes for nothing. I beseech our Lord so to lead you and strengthen you by His grace, that the work He has begun in you may ever remain whole and inviolate, and in the end be happily brought to its accomplishment. You will not do little, if you can shield yourself against that charm of exaggerating and of lessening objects, which the spirit of the Court casts upon the things of God, and upon those of the world, from whence ensues so strange a seduction for souls. If you know how to use the light and the help of the Spirit of God well, you will be constant in the practice of prayer; you will set bounds to your ambition in worldly schemes, and you will collect all your powers to employ them in the service of God, without letting your fervour be relaxed by the office the king has given you, for his service in Languedoc. Besides the news you send me relating to the government of the two provinces, a rumour is current here, that that of Guienne is going to be given to His Highness.*

Although it would be a great consolation to us, as you may imagine, nevertheless we submit to all it may please our Lord to appoint, being well per-

* The Prince de Conti.

suaded that all these arrangements are in His hands. Such an appointment would be adverse to your interests, but not to ours, which go rather poorly, in what concerns God. However, neither you nor we ought to seek anything but the accomplishment of His holy will. Whatever happens, there is one thing that we should steadily push on, our advance in divine love. To succeed in this, we must firmly establish in us a diligent care for our amendment, discover in what we are slack, and root out all that opposes perfect purity of heart. Moreover, we must endeavour always to be carrying out and aiming at some distinct good, which shall keep us devoutly employed in God's service, and fervently intent upon procuring His glory.

I imagine that you worthily fulfil this duty, and that you keep yourself on your guard against relaxation. If you give way to it, it would make you follow after the low gratifications of the senses, and would fill your heart with worldly designs. When this charm has once deluded a man, he remains unconsciously enchanted, without becoming aware of it, until he is removed from this world to go and appear before God. This removal takes some people rather by surprise. We have had an example quite recently here in the person of a Councillor of the High Chamber, who had made the best possible resolution of leading a virtuous life; of which he talked to us as of a plan quite ready to be carried out, and he died almost suddenly, while reporting a trial. The person, who will present this letter to you, will let you know the particulars of this death. We have also

learnt that of Father du Fresne, and I beg you to make it known to His Highness. This Father died at Poitiers, after having preached the Lent with great spirit. He was seized with a fever soon after Easter, which very soon carried him off.

May God grant us the grace of being so prepared for death, that it may be a joy and consolation to us to leave this world. For this end, we must attach ourselves to nothing. Oh! what confidence is felt at the hour of death, when we are not retained to the world by affection for anything created! Moreover, we must contract such a friendship with Jesus Christ, that we may not dread to fall into His hands, but may be able to say, like S. Teresa: "*I do not fear to fall into the hands of Him, whom I have loved above all things in the world.*" I well know that it is difficult for persons of your condition to possess such a familiarity with our Lord, and that the Holy Spirit does not even always offer a sufficiently great interior help for that; but I well know also that our too low ideas keep us for a very long time below our capacity. I do not know whether those members of His Highness's household who are acquaintances of mine, are with you. Oblige me by presenting my very humble remembrances to them, particularly to the M. M. Bertaud. Let M. Le Picard also receive a token of my recollection of him. If His Highness passes through Bordeaux again, in returning to Court, we shall have the gratification of seeing all these gentlemen, and it will be a subject of great joy to us. I shall then be able to converse with you with all freedom,

I am, &c.

LETTER XXIII.

To Mother Mary of S. Elias, Prioress of the Second Convent of Carmelites, at Bordeaux.

HE BEGS HER TO EMPLOY HERSELF IN WINNING ENTIRELY TO GOD HENRIETTA-GABRIELLE DE THOU, THE LADY-PRESIDENT IN CHIEF OF PONTAC, DAUGHTER OF M. DE THOU, CHIEF PRESIDENT OF THE PARLIAMENT OF PARIS, FOR WHOM OUR LORD HAD GIVEN HIM A VERY SPECIAL AFFECTION.—SHE WAS A LADY WHOSE MERIT EQUALLED HER BIRTH. HER EULOGY WILL BE FOUND IN THE LIFE OF FATHER SURIN WHEN IT IS PUBLISHED.

April 30, 1662.

I feel myself strongly impelled to beg you to write to Madame, our chief President, to acquaint her with the fervour of my zeal for her sanctification. Tell her I wish that she may fully correspond to grace, and that our Lord may find in her the disposition which He requires of her for the accomplishment of His designs. Borrow of S. Teresa some of her burning arrows, to pierce with them the heart of your friend, and let her well understand, the storms being now past, God intends that, in the calm in which He now places her, she should give herself entirely to Him, and break all the ties which may still bind her to the world. He wishes her, by a generous effort, to free herself from all, that might let and hinder her, from going to rest herself upon the breast of His divine

love. Let her withdraw her eyes from all human considerations, to regard with a pure and single eye, what is most pleasing to His divine Majesty. Let her trample underfoot all the interests of created things, so as to be no longer affected but by zeal for His glory and His holy service. Let her no longer seek support or put her trust but in Him alone, abandoning herself to the care of His divine providence. Let her get a true estimate of earthly things, seeing that the grandeurs of the world are but a little smoke, which vanishes in a moment, and that all is nothing, save only the knowledge and love of God and of His Son Jesus Christ. Let her establish herself firmly in this truth, which now indeed we see only through the veil of faith, but which will be made clearly manifest to her at the hour of death. Tell her, that never losing sight of this vision of truth, she should bear herself towards every one with perfect detachment, and a holy liberty of mind, not ceasing at all times to ask this grace of our Lord.

This is not a melancholy idea, it is one which is a source of joy, of a true and very great joy, which God will give to her, if she keep herself unalterably attached to Him. She will be astonished to find that a continual peace, sweetness, and joy, are her portion. The happiness I wish her, and the grace I unceasingly ask for her is, that Jesus Christ, in His glory, in His greatness, and in His triumph, may overthrow and destroy in her all that shall oppose His designs, and kindle in her soul such a burning fire, as to make of her heart a furnace, in which she shall be joyously

consumed with seraphic flames. This is not so impossible as we often fancy it to be. Step by step, by a scrupulous fidelity, and by a constant attention in watching over our interior, we overcome in the end what seemed at first insurmountable, and we carry out things, the very idea of which seemed to swallow up all our strength. Since our Lord has already given her confidence, I can assure her that if she only corresponds with all her might to the grace which inclines her to a thorough conversion of herself to Him, if she put far from her the world and things created, He will accomplish the work, that work so dreaded of hell, so little known by the world, so desired by Angels; that work, the work of loving—and of loving what? of loving a treasure, which ravishes the soul with its supreme goodness, which enriches her with a divine wealth, which satiates her with its holy sweetness.

Alas! what does the human heart ask for, but to be filled? What makes all the great of this world labour so, but that they are searching everywhere for the means of filling themselves with treasures? And it is here that the real treasure is to be found. Kingdoms, visions of glory and of greatness, immense treasures: these are what Jesus Christ gives beloved in His poverty, in His humility, and in His incessant zeal for procuring His Father's glory. These riches, too, these joys, these pleasures, are accompanied by perfect righteousness and holiness. And for whom is all this prepared? Is it for Carmelites only? It is for all souls that follow after Jesus Christ and put His doctrine into practice, that mortify their vain

desires, and array themselves beside their Master. It is there that the fulness of peace is found; there is the fountain whence flow torrents of grace; there are the treasures and storehouses of light, wisdom, truth, and life. Inspire this lady, my good mother, with courage to enshrine Jesus Christ in her heart, to reign there with such an ascendancy, that nothing may be able to dispute with Him, I do not say merely the first place in it, but the complete possession of it. Thus may He have full power of working in this soul which He has created, redeemed, and favoured with so many graces; of working, I mean, according to the designs He has of communicating Himself fully to her, and of conversing familiarly with her. For this is His wish. He desires she should be His conquest; He desires to give Himself to her, to converse with her, to shed His Spirit and His divinity upon her, that she may be filled with it, as a thirsty stomach gets filled and penetrated with some delicious cordial, which then insinuates itself into all the rest of the body, giving it refreshment and strength, and leaving no part empty.

I think you will do well to send her this letter, for it has insensibly become altogether hers. And what for yourself? give her of your abundance, my dear Mother. For the holy liberty which in your state you enjoy, the solitude in which you are enclosed with Jesus Christ, the entire privation of all earthly things to which you are reduced, is a prolific soil which should supply you with good things for yourself and for others. Then do, my dear Mother, what I so ardently desire, and believe me to be, &c.

LETTER XXIV.

To the Lady-President in chief of Pontac.

AGAINST THE VANITY OF THOSE WHO WRITE PORTRAITS OF THEMSELVES.

Bordeaux, May 12, 1660.

Since you sincerely wish to serve God, and seek in earnest the means of accomplishing this desire, let me tell you, Madame, that you must fix your eyes upon the chief point of the doctrine of the Divine Master, comprehended in these words: "*He who will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.*" This is the first lesson you have to learn, a lesson entirely opposed to the spirit of the world and to its instincts, which all tend to keep up in us a false love of ourselves. The fashions of the world are inventions of this love, so untiringly ingenious in producing everything fresh to satisfy itself with. These its inventions are condemned by the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

One of the first results of this self-love in worldly persons, is that they begin to regard themselves with complacency, feeding themselves with the delightful vision of their own perfections, and of such qualities as they fancy to be admirable in them. Then they take the liberty of making known to the world their thoughts and feelings about the object of their self-love. People have come, in

this century, to such a degree of vain-glory, that persons are to be found who have no hesitation in drawing their own portrait, not with a pencil, indeed, but with the pen. They faithfully depict themselves upon paper, noting especially all the advantages they possess, the traits of their countenance, the colour of their hair, their figure, their manners and disposition, their complexion, their inclinations. They make reflections upon all this, which they ought to be quite ashamed of, as being not only contrary to Christian humility, but also to that modesty with which reason alone inspires the faithful, amongst whom examples of such vanity are scarcely to be found. Those of whom I speak, instead of following the doctrine and example of Jesus Christ, who, as the apostle says, did "*not seek to please Himself;*" instead of losing sight of themselves, according to the spirit of the Gospel, which preaches nothing to us more strongly than that abnegation, and that holy hatred of ourselves, which dispose us to be occupied only with God, His presence and His love: these vain self-lovers, on the contrary, delight in thinking of what they are. And in order to make others think as they do themselves; to bring themselves more forward before the eyes of all, they not only have pictures of themselves painted, keeping some and making presents of others to their friends; but they further compose descriptions of their persons in writing, as though they wished to make their own panegyric. Now, three great vices are thus made apparent in them.

First, an idleness unworthy of a soul which is created only for God. For a man must have

plenty of leisure, when he is taken up by things, that are so little and so low. Natural sense and propriety should suffice to withdraw a well-constituted mind from such amusements as these. It is a loss of time, which can only leave behind it regret and confusion.

Secondly; great pride, in believing themselves worthy subjects, on which to spend that time, which should only be applied to the practice of virtue. Properly, they should have a scruple in being occupied about themselves, or in occupying others about them, a single moment.

Thirdly; extreme vanity, in thinking it a permissible thing to take pleasure in the contemplation and relation of what concerns themselves. Such an intent consideration of oneself would be very much to our purpose, when preparing for a general confession, or when desirous of knowing our wretchedness, so as to be confounded by it, and to humble ourselves for it before God. Excepting in that case we must be always out of ourselves, in order to transfer ourselves altogether into God. The little book of the *Imitation of Jesus Christ*, when representing God as speaking to the soul that desires to attain perfection, says the following weighty words: *In proportion as thou forsakest thyself, thou shalt be able to enter into Me.* But what effort do they make to forsake themselves, who are always intrenched in their self-love, and who try to draw others into it, passing their portrait from hand to hand? They are far removed from the sentiments of the Saints, who abhorred and could scarcely endure themselves: like a S. Catharine of Genoa, who said she preferred seeing

the devil to seeing herself, esteeming herself more deformed than that unhappy spirit; a S. Vincent Ferrer, who says, in his "Treatise on the Spiritual Life," that he could no more bear himself than he could a putrid dog, which he must carry about with him.

How contrary are the laws of the world to those of God, in permitting men to take pleasure in themselves, and to seek their own glory, by communicating to others those mental productions, in which they have expressed the favourable ideas they have conceived of their persons! For you only made this work with the design of letting it be seen, or you cannot refuse it to him who asks you for it, for fear of displeasing him. The image of Jesus Christ is the thing we ought to gaze upon. That divine painting it is that ought to be copied in our hearts; those beautiful eyes which, by their attractiveness, win the most rebellious souls; that beautiful brow which makes the serenity of paradise; that sweet mouth whose smile carries consolation down deep into the soul of the afflicted; that glorious Face whose majesty makes hell tremble; those beautiful locks of hair which bind so many hearts captive, under the laws of sacred love; that august figure worthy of the Sovereign Monarch of all; that fascinating voice which gives life to all who hear it. This is the form which should be ever present to the mind, instead of our amusing ourselves with self-contemplation. Do you not see that these admirable features of the beauty of the God-Man and His perfections quite blot out all your own, and that His adorable countenance casts forth rays and lightnings, which put yours into

obscurity, and which cause all your advantages to disappear, and to lose themselves and fade away in the glory of the Son of God? "Quid superbis, terra et cinis?" What cause have you to glory, you who are but dust and ashes? The soul engaged with Jesus Christ finds in Him wherewith to satisfy herself, in contemplating a beauty, before which the stars pale; a beauty which ravishes the Angels; a beauty which would fascinate you if you were acquainted with it, and which would so fix your eyes that they could not stray elsewhere. Consider His disposition, His temperament, His inclinations, His sweetness, able to melt into tears of consolation those souls who experience it; His humility, which makes itself felt even amidst the splendours of His glory, and of His sovereign power; a thing which made S. Teresa faint when she thought upon it.

Here is an object worthy of consideration. But who is it that is admitted to the contemplation of this incomparable object? it is a soul dead to herself and to the calls of her senses, a foe to the pleasures and vanities of the world. She it is who may aspire to the friendship of the Son of God, and who finds her delights in considering His holy Humanity. Later on she is introduced into the palace of the Spirit, there to contemplate the Divinity, and to receive its likeness into her own soul. She sees there, with the eyes of an ardent and exalted faith, the Father of mercies; she feels His ineffable sweetness, and experiences that He is truly a God of goodness. She sees there the goodness of the Word, shining through His Humanity, which fills the heavens with glory,

and causes a sweet ravishment to recollected souls. There she tastes the consolation and the joy of the Holy Spirit, who, pouring Himself into the breasts of the children of God, penetrates them, sustains them, animates them, becomes to them the happiness of this life. This is what is prepared for those who are intent upon forming in their souls the likeness of Jesus Christ, and who have their delights in its consideration. But to this end we must hate self, and be without beauty in our own eyes. For those, who look upon themselves with complacency, are abominable in the eyes of God, who rejects the proud, and gives His grace to the humble.

In Him, that I am, &c.

LETTER XXV.

To the same.

THAT PERFECT DETACHMENT FROM CREATURES IS THE MEANS OF ATTAINING TO THE PERFECT LOVE OF GOD.—PRAISE OF THE "INTERIOR CHRISTIAN" BY M. DE BERNIERES.

Halle, November 30, 1661.

Divine Providence, obliging me to make a longer stay here than I had expected, gives me leisure and opportunity of communicating with you oftener than I had thought to be able to do. I will then make use of it to speak to you of that which above all else I consider most useful to your

soul, and most capable of leading you to the perfection of that Christian life, to which you aspire.

This is the practice of the holy love of God; in which three things may be considered; its causes, its exercise, and its effects. The true cause of divine love is the elevation of the heart above creatures, by which we detach it entirely from them, and place it in an intrenchment; so separating us from them that we no longer seek our own satisfaction nor the heart's rest in them. What I tell you here, you have heard said a hundred times, and you are well persuaded that it is one of the fundamental maxims of the spiritual life.

This detachment may be practised in two ways: First, upon the occasions of our intercourse with others, and in all the use of created things, which is required of us by our state, duty, or the dispositions of Providence; — the soul watches over herself, and by continual mental attention, takes care that no created thing usurp those rights of engaging or attaching her to itself, which belongs to God alone. Secondly, when disengaged from affairs and at liberty, as I imagine you now are, in the freedom of solitude, the soul, placing herself in the presence of God, takes pleasure in passing all created things in review, just to send them about their business; those especially towards which she feels most inclination. She regards them with contempt in the light of faith, and repulsing them generously with a holy pride, she says to them: "*Go, withdraw, and leave me alone to my God.*" For this it is not necessary to dispense yourself from the legitimate

duties you owe to those, with whom it is God's will you should be engaged, nor that you should separate yourself from their society, or refuse to hold communication with them. It is your heart only that must be placed in solitude, and made independent of all created things. None must be allowed to approach it, unless the exercise of a true charity so command; you must condemn all the attachments which you discover there, banishing from it all that you see would encroach upon the jurisdiction of pure love. When you shall have established your heart in this freedom and perfect liberty, God alone will possess, engage, and fill, it with His love.

This detachment from creatures is, in my opinion, the straight road that leads to the love of God; it is the cause which infallibly produces it, by removing the only obstacle to its entering the heart, and reigning over it. This is a thing I incessantly repeat, and which I could not say too often, nor express strongly enough. As to the exercise of divine love and its effects, I shall say nothing, stopping short at its primary origin, namely, the preparation of heart, of which I have just spoken. The exercise of this holy love and its effects become sufficiently known to the soul, when she has once reached the happy goal of its attainment. Thenceforward she has not much to do. God guides her Himself; and His principal work consists in that preparation, which sets the heart entirely free. I must tell you that we have much consolation here. Besides that virtuous lady, with whom we are staying, we have also Madame de Rasac, who stands well with our Lord

to my mind. Madame de Massiot also is our neighbour, and we see her. We only want you at Aubrion. I shall still remain here the rest of the week; we are too well off for bodily comforts, and highly pleased with some works of grace, which our Lord has performed here. It really seems as though Providence had led us here, and still retains us. So act, by the abandonment of all that hinders your union with God, that you may put yourself in a condition to content Him fully, and to prepare for Him a place in your soul, which shall be His eternal habitation. In this goal should terminate all the wisdom and all the efforts, of which the soul is capable. I have found here, in the hands of Madame de Rasac, a book entitled *The Interior Christian*. I find it really so much to my liking, that I no longer now consider the Spiritual Catechism necessary, which before I believed to be extremely useful. If I had seen this one sooner, I should not have thought it needful to give that to the public; for in this book is found all that I desire a person should know for the spiritual life.

LETTER XXVI.

To the same.

THE DISPOSITIONS, GENERAL AS WELL AS PARTICULAR, WHICH ARE REQUISITE FOR THE PERFECT SERVICE OF GOD.

Bordeaux, December 2, 1661.

My very dear daughter,

You wish me to call you so, and I cannot refuse you this title. Not being able to communicate my sentiments to you as soon as I could wish, I make them over to your good Angel, and pray him to inspire you with them. It seems to me that, in order to correspond to the many mercies you have experienced in time past, and to this last favour He has just granted you of a happy return to your home, our Lord expects you to apply yourself wholly to His service.

For this two kinds of dispositions are necessary, the one kind general and the other particular. The general is as follows; first, to prepare yourself for all that it may please God to tell you in your heart; secondly, to break through every attachment whatsoever which you may chance to have, choosing to love nothing but by His commands and by His grace; thirdly, never to go against the light He gives you, and to refuse Him nothing He asks of you, having a general will to embrace every sort of good within the range of the perfec-

tion of which you are capable, without at all limiting either His motions or your co-operation; fourthly, to establish in yourself more and more a filial confidence amidst all your depressions and faults, never letting yourself lapse into discouragement; fifthly, constantly to entertain the desire of tending to perfection, employing to this intent all the means suggested to you by those whom our Lord has inspired you to choose for the guidance of your soul.

The particular dispositions are ;—so to distrust the world and its fashion, its applause, and its vanities, as not to grant them the least entrance into your heart, opening it only to God and to His graces, and keeping it closed to all else with inviolable fidelity; in the second place, to mistrust the wiles and the malice of nature, which has deceived you until now, less through your ignorance than your connivance and slack disposition. For the grace given you by our Lord, now so long, has not allowed to remain hidden from you the artifices and instincts of nature. Resolve henceforward, by the generous effort of a fervent soul, to prevent yourself from being any longer seduced by this enemy of grace. I consider it beyond a doubt that God will secure you from its deceits, if you make a good choice of a wise director, to whom you may give an exact account of your whole conduct. What ruins us is our connivance with nature and with self-love; our affected ignorance, and the darkness in which we voluntarily enshroud ourselves, so as not to see the light which opposes our inclinations. The third disposition is, to take up in detail all the means, which lead direct to

God; for example, to repress the too great outpourings of the heart in unprofitable conversations. When you are unable to avoid society, bring forward boldly, in a simple way, some good discourse such as may raise the heart to God, and never suffer any that is vain and trifling. Engrave well in your memory these words of S. Isidore, which I pray the Holy Spirit to make you thoroughly penetrate. "Multos remissa conversatio ad pristinos errores reducit." Many fall back into their former errors and old imperfections, by giving way to relaxation in visits and worldly conversations. This is, perhaps, the thing of all others that I bear most in mind, and that most helps me to keep myself well with God. I reveal it to you, as to a person, for whom I desire the same good as for myself. I assure you that I feel strongly animated to assist you, and

I am, with all my heart, &c.

LETTER XXVII.

To the same.

AN EXHORTATION TO PREPARE HERSELF FOR THE FEAST OF PENTECOST.—SOME EFFECTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN SOULS.

I use the leisure which Providence gives me, and the occasion presented to me, to suggest to you some thoughts that may help you to converse with God during this holy season. It is a time, no

only of joy from the memory of the resurrection of Our Lord, but of a holy and divine warmth through our expectation of the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Church keeps us all, as it were, waiting for this celestial fire, which does not come to destroy, but to quicken our souls, raising them from earth to heaven by its fervour and activity. The design of God in sending His Holy Spirit into the world, is that He may work in us, as fire does when it fastens upon a material proper to receive its action. This action is; first, to dispose us for the effect of the great and sublime grace of divine love; then to light up in us the fire of this pure love to the full; even to that point of perfection in which it causes those holy and exquisite transports, known only to those who have experienced them, and of which no one has experience but those, who have prepared their hearts for this grace, by the clearing and emptying them of all the things of earth.

When God has guided a soul to the experience of these delights, these ardours and divine impetuosities, and has put her in possession of the riches of His Holy Spirit, she then knows clearly the meanness and the poverty of the grandeurs and riches of the world. We have no proper terms for expressing these supernatural goods. Our Lord in the Gospel, and the holy Apostles in their Epistles, represent them to us by the names of "*living water; of a fountain of water which springs up to heaven; of fire, of unction, of treasures;*" and by other like names which denote the wonderful effect of the Holy Spirit. The best disposition we can bring on our part, is a continual

care to mortify and purify our hearts without ceasing, until the Holy Spirit puts an end to this toil, that we may be enabled to rejoice in His gifts, to taste His sweetnesses, to burn with His fires, and to experience the effects He works in the souls He finds well disposed. His principal gifts are, first a gentle rain of consolation and of peace, which spreads and dilates its waters as far as there is depth and capacity in the soul to receive them; secondly, an abundance of divine treasures, which comes and discharges itself into the soul with great rapidity, like an impetuous torrent which has burst its dikes; thirdly, a living, delicious flame of living fire, which sweetly consumes the heart, and causes in the soul an impression both of strength and languor, so that she is at the same time both languishing and vigorous; languishing, because she cannot endure the excess of the ardour which burns her; vigorous, because the fire of her zeal, animating her with an untiring courage, makes her labour for God. She is completely exhausted, and yet she feels transports which drive her on to the pursuit of a much greater good than heaven, the interest of God, which, when we really know it, has more power to charm us than all that heaven could give us out of God.

Profit by your solitude, to prepare yourself for these loving communications of the Holy Spirit, to which I invite you. The sweetest of these consolations is that which the enjoyment of the most august mystery of the Holy Trinity produces, in which the delights of God are all contained. The immense and infinitely sweet majesty of the Father of Mercies, the fascinating beauty of

the Word, the penetrating unction of the Holy Spirit, are the solid joy and happiness of souls, to whom God deigns to make Himself felt upon earth. May you experience this joy. I must conclude, I am at the end of my paper.

LETTER XXVIII.

To the same.

HE ENTRUSTS A WORK OF CHARITY TO HER, AND EXHORTS HER TO PREPARE HERSELF FOR THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND FOR HIS DIVINE COMMUNICATIONS.

Bordeaux, May 12, 1662.

The misery of the prisoner of whom I spoke to you, obliges me to write to you. He has fallen grievously ill, and the charitable persons who employ themselves in the relief of prisoners would much like to obtain permission to transport him out of the prison, to some place where he could be better assisted. Having been to see the chief president, to speak to him of the Nun of Argental, for whom I had so successfully made use of your interest, I found there the devoted visitors of the prisons, who had come to present their request in favour of La Lane. I joined my intercession to theirs, but the only answer I received from the chief president was, that it was a thing he left to the course of justice. It is said that this favour depends upon you, and it is to ask it of you that I

now write. Moreover, God gives us certain openings for the improvement of the manufacture, which we should like to talk over with you, being in want of your advice and help. Perhaps it will be time enough for that on your return. To-day Mademoiselle de Rousille is to enter the Carmelites of the first Convent, without her mother's knowledge, from whom she steals away, to escape the little sorrows, which natural tenderness generally cause upon such occasions, and to take this happy step freely. The plan was formed before the departure of M. d'Acqs, and it is to be executed to-day. I believe I shall be occupied to-morrow in alleviating the wound it will inflict upon the mother's heart. It seems as though Providence had led her to Bordeaux, only to afford an opportunity for such a good deed. She is to return alone into Poitou, at the first opportunity.

For yourself, Madam, what I have to tell you is that our chief business at this time is, to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Holy Spirit, which takes place afresh at this great festival, in all who make themselves worthy to receive Him. I wish you this happiness, and that when the Holy Spirit comes down upon you, He may gloriously manifest His divine work in you in one of the ways, in which He is wont to make Himself felt by the soul; whether *as a fire* to inflame you, as *a torrent* to inundate your heart, or in the manner in which He made Himself felt by Elijah, "*as a soft and gentle wind*," bringing a peaceful calm to all the powers of your soul; or else in the way of which I formerly spoke to you, in the form of an arrow to pierce your heart, so as, by a healthful and divine

wound, to make the love of the world, with the passions and sentiments of nature, to die there, and to render your heart indifferent to its own interests, and to all the things of earth. I would willingly dilate upon this subject, so as to excite, if possible, in you an ardent desire of experiencing this wonderful effect of the Holy Ghost, of which I have formerly spoken to you, as the greatest good fortune I could wish you in the state of grace. With all my heart I desire it for you, and I pray the Holy Spirit to wound you, in the midst of your heart, with that holy and delicious wound, which leaves on the soul such a profound impression of divine love, that you will not be able to do aught but sigh after God without ceasing. May you thus experience such an ardour and unceasing anxiety for God, as to find no pleasure or rest in creatures out of Him, nor feel any attraction but for what relates to the glory of God, so that His least interests may affect you as keenly, as the most important of your own, in a human sense, would be wont to do. Never hope to reach that point until you have received this wound of love, which causes the souls that are pierced with it to languish, moan, and sigh incessantly. Prepare yourself to receive it, Madame; and for this end strive to disentangle your heart from all disorderly affections, and to set it at liberty. Die to all that the world most esteems and covets, and be prepared to endure the contempt and scorn of creatures;—even of the persons, most dear to you. When you have passed through these kind of trials, which our Lord requires of you, you will then be capable of receiving the blessed strokes, which

divine love gives to the souls consecrated to it, and you may aspire to the good fortune I wish you.

I am, with all my heart, &c.

LETTER XXIX.

To the same.

THAT THE TRUTHS OF FAITH SHOULD BE THE SUBJECT OF OUR CONVERSATIONS.— EFFECTS OF THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT INTO OUR SOULS.

Bordeaux, May 24, 1662.

I have just received your letter, and I see that you have received the last of mine, but not another, in which I did not speak of any business; it was only a spiritual communication. It is true that these kinds of communications are our real business; at least I arrange that they should be so, in my case. I do not now remember of what particular subject I treated; but even should my letter be lost, I hold still that we have not really lost anything, since God is a fund that cannot be exhausted; and we are of the humour never to tire in talking of Him. Again, occasion for doing so continually presents itself, provided we are on the look out for it, and have a real relish for the things of God.

I know not, Madame, whether it is because we are growing old, and seem, as it were, about to leave the world, but for some reason or other I

find that ideas of the future life, and thoughts of the things which the Gospel teaches, are the true language of our heart, and those are precisely the subjects, of which we should speak to those, who are really travelling to the promised land. The approaching festival supplies us with ample matter. I am to preach that day to the Nuns of your Convent; I preached on Ascension Day to those of the First Monastery, where Mademoiselle de Rousille is. Before me were the people of both worlds. Those of this terrene world were certain ladies of rank, magnificently dressed, with patches and curled hair. These were not too well pleased with my sermon. Those of the other world were Carmelites, and a few devout persons, for whom, and to whom, I chiefly spoke. I think I shall do the same the day of Pentecost. This divine fire will inflame those hearts that have prepared themselves to receive it. Those that have not done so, far from feeling its warmth, will not perhaps have the advantage of even seeing it.

May you be of the number of those who get a share in its principal fruit, to wit, that ardour for God and that holy energy, which it communicates to the soul. It pleases me much to represent to myself the Divine Spirit under the figure of a glorious rain; or again of a torrent of living water. The consolation of the Holy Spirit, with which the apostles were inundated the day of Pentecost, is perhaps thus symbolized. This water was, however, also a fire, refreshing and inflaming at the same time. But who are the Apostles? those who had prepared themselves for it by retreat and prayer, united together in one place, disgusted

with the world and with the vanities of the earth. I pray God that He may give us a share of their holy dispositions, so that we may be also sharers of their joys, and that through our disgust of this world, now more corrupted than ever, we may be found capable of receiving the graces of the Spirit of consolation. May He give them to you with no other limits than those which it may please Him to determine, finding no hindrance in you. In this adorable Spirit I am, &c.

LETTER XXX.

To the same.

HE EXHORTS HER TO RECOLLECTION, TO PEACE OF SOUL, TO BE FAITHFUL IN KEEPING HERSELF ATTENTIVE TO GOD, TO FOLLOW THE LEADINGS OF GRACE AND INTERIOR LIGHTS.

I have at length deciphered your last letter, and, with the help of Father Batide, have read almost all it contains. I will do my best to have the consolation of seeing you again; I may manage to do this in a few days, in the manner I have mentioned to the same father. After considering all that passes in you, I think all your care should be given to the preserving of grace; not that sanctifying grace merely, which we receive at baptism, but that also which keeps us at this present time recollected and attentive to God, and which consists in a sweet peace, and a facility of being

affected by the things of piety. We should use the more vigilance in preserving this peace in proportion to the difficulty there is in recovering it when lost. It abandons us when we neglect it, and we find ourselves dissipated, feeble, and constrained to have recourse to the gratifications of nature. On the contrary, whilst it accompanies us, we are strong and inclined to good. When, therefore, you perceive anything, that takes away from you this strength and divine assistance, and draws you to worldly things, be faithful and courageous in flying from it at once, and withdrawing from it, in order to keep yourself at peace and rest in God. This is to be done gently, without effort or violence, which might injure the health. Sometimes it cannot be done without some repugnance on the part of nature, which wishes to grovel in low and earthly things, by giving way to the pleasures of the senses. Nature, however, must always be kept under, if we would be prepared always to breathe the air of grace. The conversation of devout persons and attention to holy things is extremely useful to this end. Your whole progress consists in not interrupting, during the course of the day, this disposition of peace and devotion, which prayer, the reading of good books, the society and conversation of spiritual persons produce in your soul. Now, as in our intercourse with creatures many things we meet with oppose this spirit of devotion and recollection, all must be received with a cheerful and tranquil heart, not letting anything worry you, and avoiding, moreover, relaxations and all that is of the spirit of the

world, which, under specious appearances, instils its venom imperceptibly into slothful souls.

Fidelity in so keeping yourself will be to you the source of all your good. Pay great attention to this point, proceeding, however, quietly in all things; not interesting yourself much in anything whatsoever, but abandoning all to God; commending to Him all that affects you, and leaving its disposition absolutely to Him; thinking, on your part, only of keeping close to Him, without ever leaving Him. For you must deem nothing of greater importance, than to keep up with Him this intercourse of love, of submission and fidelity, so as unceasingly to tend to your chief end, which is to remain united to God. Let it be your satisfaction to be assured that God is pleased with you; you will have that assurance from the testimony, that your conscience will give you in all things; for it is an incorruptible witness, a truthful censor, that gives the law upon all things, and passes nothing by. The conscience is an aid to grace, which never fails to the soul. She feels its help all the more present, in proportion as her will to serve God is more determined. We must obey this light, and follow this faithful guide in all things, otherwise we shall remain in the obscurity of an uncertain vagueness, which is the miserable state of souls, that have not yet given up all to God. I pray Him to pour forth His light abundantly upon you.

LETTER XXXI.

To the same.

THAT THE SOLITUDE AND FREE AIR OF THE COUNTRY INVITE SOULS TO RECOLLECTION OF SPIRIT, AND TO THE EXPANSION OF THE HEART IN GOD. EULOGY OF SAINT PAULINUS AND OF THE BLESSED ALOYSIUS OF GONZAGA, TWO EXCELLENT MODELS OF CONTEMPT OF THE WORLD.

Whilst enjoying the free air of the country, we ought to take occasion thereby to give free scope to the mind, to raise itself to God, and to speak of Him. I find reason for this in two things, which, though apparently contrary, have with each other a perfect connection; one is the recollection, the other the expansion of the heart, two opposite motions, but which tend to one and the same end. Recollection comes from solitude, and the being separated from what men call business, a thing which cannot be avoided during residence in towns. Expansion proceeds from that free breadth of air we breathe in the country, which seems to communicate a like disposition to the soul. I wish you, Madame, these two excellent graces, that you may be so happy as to unite together recollection of mind, and this holy expansion of the heart in God.

Recollection withdraws the senses from their dissipation, condenses the powers within, arrests natural activity, produces interior calm and peace

of heart, gathers up the soul into one point, shuts her up in God, and fixes her upon this sole possession of God, which constitutes her happiness and repose. On Sunday, which was the day of my departure, I went to see you before coming here, but the tide hurrying us, I could not stop till the end of your dinner. However, I went to the house of M. l'Abbé de Saint F., because I had with me a Religious who understands architecture. I stopped a little to look at what first presents itself to the eyes in this building, which I had never been near before, and which is very curious. I reflected that what satisfies the senses, and curiosity, is a dangerous snare to recollection; and that when we are dissipated, an evil already great, we further run the risk of giving entrance to another yet greater evil, the love of the world, from the pleasure we take in the enjoyment of what men esteem, and which binds them to the world; I mean the pomp, the magnificence, and the vain splendour, which feeds the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. I was told that in this abode there is a room, which the Abbé means to have entirely gilt. I see in this to what lengths luxury is carried, in order to try and to satisfy the mind, that one should desire to dwell and bury himself, so to speak, in gold.

I observe, after all, that this luxury is in some sort an imitation of the glory, for which God has created us. For, when we follow our natural instincts, it comes to pass, as says S. Augustine, that, even in evil itself, we unthinkingly seek after God, since we seek a thing, which can be found but in God. We seek glory, pleasure, rest, which

are not to be met with out of God. Thus, in the love and search after what is most splendid, and most charming in the world, we follow the bent of that noble and divine inclination, which we have naturally for the sovereign good; but we deceive ourselves, because we do not take the straight road to the goal we would reach. We seek for what God wishes to give us, but we seek it where it is not, and by paths which do not lead to it. It is by poverty, by simplicity, by contempt of the world, by the mortification of the senses, that we attain to the true glory, and to the perfect satisfaction of life. Love then, Madame, I beseech you, and practise, as much as you can, this poverty so precious, this contempt and this stripping off of the grandeurs and pomp of the world. Fly the expansion of heart, which proceeds from the enjoyment of transitory possessions and pleasures. Enter into the recollection, which proceeds from the privation and cutting away of them. There you will find God, who is to be found only in the void, from which creatures have been banished. In possessing Him, you will taste that solid joy, which can alone devoutly expand the heart.

I write to you from the country, in this splendid atmosphere, between the two seas, the 20th of June, Feast of S. Paulinus, 1662. In dating my letter, I recollected S. Paulinus, who should be dear to us, as he was of our province of Guienne, and has given to us a marvellous example of contempt of the world. He possessed such great estates in Gaul, in Spain, and in Italy, that the poet Ausonius, his friend and our fellow-citizen, calls them "Paulini regna," the kingdoms of

Paulinus. He was so generous as to forsake all this in a single day, to make himself voluntarily poor, and door keeper of the Church of S. Felix of Nola; a thing that gave occasion to the principal fathers and doctors of the Church who lived in his time, to praise and to exalt him as a prodigy of grace. God also, in reward for all that he had given up for Him, loaded him with heavenly riches and consolations. He had such an ardent and tender love for our Lord, that the thought alone of Jesus flooded his eyes with tears. These are the riches we ought to long for; the only lawful aim of our ambition, could we but recognize the real treasures; but such treasures are incomprehensible. May it please God to give you the spirit of S. Paulinus, and to take from you that vain satisfaction and that false joy which the great things of the earth imperceptibly instil into hearts.

I shall not believe, Madame, that your heart is truly converted and altogether won to God, till I see this contempt of the world appear in you, as a beautiful diamond glows upon the head of a queen. Let us see, now, how we stand with regard to this point. Examine your position, you and those who are nearest you, to whom you are bound to give instruction and example. Here I am at the end of my sheet of paper. I am tempted to fill yet another upon this subject, so much does it interest me and seem full of matter and importance. But I must end nevertheless. I beseech our Lord to enlarge on this subject in the depths of your soul, and to give to it all the weight it deserves, and that of which you are in need.

In reading over my letter, I have perceived a

mistake which supplies me with a new subject of intercourse upon the same matter. The feast of S. Paulinus is not to-day; it is the 22nd instant, and to-morrow is the day of the death of the blessed Aloysius of Gonzaga, a young prince of the house of Mantua, and a rare model of contempt of the world, as well as S. Paulinus. The example of these Saints ought to make an impression upon our souls, the very reverse of that, which is effected generally by the sight of worldly grandeurs and pomps, which is to make us esteem and desire them. Thus the example of an Aloysius of Gonzaga inspires an ardour for God, and a desire of imitating Jesus Christ, who, being truly a prince and King of kings, gives to princes of the earth and to the great of this world, when He communicates His Spirit to them, the instinct and the impulse to despise crowns and empires, grandeurs and riches, in order to make themselves poor, abject and contemptible in the eyes of men.

Aloysius of Gonzaga often practised this point of perfection, but particularly when, being still Marquis of Castillon, in a celebrated tournament which took place at Florence, instead of appearing in an equipage conformable to his birth, he showed himself that day, throughout the whole town, mounted upon a wretched mule, on purpose to be laughed at by everyone. It was truly the Spirit of God which inclined him to so extraordinary an action, to make the contempt of the world and the love of abjection triumph upon the theatre where others, by their magnificence, were making temporal pomp and vanity to triumph. See what an opposition between the conduct of the Saints and

that of people of the world. It should, at least, moderate the ardour we have for all that the world esteems; and yet we cease not to speak of the world's successes with praise; we take pleasure in relating the things which flatter our pride, and we exalt in our mind the imaginary happiness of those who possess these advantages. I pray God to free you entirely from this servitude of the spirit of the world, and to establish solidly in you the sentiments of Christian simplicity, and of the humility, with which the Holy Spirit inspires souls that abandon themselves to His guidance. But, alas! how rare among Christians are these virtues so recommended by the holy apostles! It is so difficult to induce people to their practice, that after the fine sermons of a whole Lent, which have been received with the general applause of a great audience, scarcely will one solitary lady of rank be seen to give up her luxury, and to free herself from the slavery of vanity.

Having written this, I went out for a walk, and I met a village wedding, to which I was invited; I thought of the marriage of Cana. The bride, in her smart attire, after the fashion of these good people, appeared to me quite ridiculous. The bridegroom, more simply dressed, seemed to me to represent with more simplicity Jesus Christ, the Spouse of holy souls. I pictured vividly to myself His love and His tenderness for the souls that He honours with the rank of spouses. All those who are in a state of grace have this blessing. But, nevertheless, it seems to me that, properly speaking, He is the Spouse of those only,

who have left all to give themselves to Him, and to attain to the perfection of His love.

I tell you my adventures, my very dear daughter, to inspire your heart with the love of Jesus Christ, and the contempt of the world, and to make of you a true spouse of the Son of God. But to merit this honour, remember that you must, by a generous stripping off of all things, acquire that perfect peace, without which divine love cannot supremely reign in your heart.

I shall go on Thursday to see Madame de Pontac, at Englade, and I will give her news of you.

LETTER XXXII.

To the same.*

IMPORTANT COUNSELS FOR UNITING THE PRACTICE OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION WITH THE LIFE OF THE FASHIONABLE WORLD.

Meditating before God upon what concerns the good and the perfection of that soul, which is so dear to me in our Lord, methinks that it consists in her paying a serious attention to God, and, with a watchful care, retrenching whatsoever opposes her sincere will to serve and adore God, in spirit and in truth. Her first effort in faithfully corresponding with grace, must be to put away all

* He addresses her in the third person.

that might subject her to the spirit of the world and the love of earthly things; to fly all that breathes of ostentation and vanity; to prefer simplicity and Christian humility to the pomps and grandeurs of the world; to free herself from the entanglement, which involves those, who make themselves dependent upon creatures, and desire to please them; to renounce the gratification which nature finds in exaltation, in honours and riches, and to stand against those impressions, which these temporal advantages generally leave in the mind and heart, through the reflections we make upon them, and the taste we acquire for them; to convince herself that the holiest persons that have ever lived, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, had an extreme aversion to all that the world esteems, and that the life they led upon earth was a condemnation of the life of the world; that if, on the one hand, persons of rank should preserve a certain freedom of mind in accommodating themselves, in external deportment, to what their condition of life requires, on the other, they should have within a contempt for all the vanities of the world, and for all they have of splendour, or what indicates any kind of distinction and preëminence. Without this precaution, it is difficult to avoid a subtle venom of pride and of haughtiness, which the advantages of birth and fortune are wont to insinuate into the soul, and which can only be avoided by the loving search after what is low, abject, and of little note in the eyes of men, which is, in fact, the most contrary to the spirit of the world and to its maxims.

Another effort of the fidelity which the soul

owes to God, is the love and practice of recollection. Without these it is not possible for us either to maintain ourselves in the exercise of the presence of God, or to have that taste for devotion, which is so necessary for advancing in the spiritual life; nor again to preserve that vigour, which is requisite for the execution of the works of God. The application, however, given to the practice of recollection, must not be violent, but gentle and moderate, its furtherance principally depending upon its assiduity. It should be practised the more constantly, in proportion as we find ourselves more exposed to a multitude of objects, capable of distracting the mind; or when temptations to eagerness, impatience, or vexation, unceasingly present themselves. For unless, by continual recollection, we keep ourselves always on our guard, and repress our vivacity, we are often in danger of committing many faults; of making but little progress; of falling into slothfulness; and of losing a great deal of time. A third counsel and proof of fidelity towards God, is to be so moderate in the enjoyment and use of pleasant things, such as the sight and intercourse of a friend, as never to allow our heart to take a full and entire satisfaction in such things, to the prejudice of the rights of God, who alone ought entirely to engage and fill the heart. Now the enjoyment of delectable objects prevents generally this fulness of God in the heart. This is why it is not sufficient to consider God in all things, and to refer all things to Him. We must, further, in the use of those things which give satisfaction, maintain our heart in an even temperament, not

permitting it to pour itself out upon them, nor to dilate itself in their enjoyment to the full, and as its inclination prompts it to do, however reasonable this inclination may appear to be.

LETTER XXXIII.

To the same.

He recommends her the mortification of her natural activity, and the exercise of humility in the midst of honours.

Chelivettes, September 20, 1662.

Your letter of the 13th of September has found me still in the country. I shall not, perhaps, leave it so soon. It is not only the pleasantness of the repose I find, which has made me like my stay here, but also the employment given me in the harvest of souls, which is very abundant. I am now again passing through the parishes where I was at the first, for I have lately made a little tour to Bordeaux. I have opportunity here of preaching the pure Gospel, with no other ornament than what grace itself gives it; and I have the consolation of seeing that these worthy people hear the Word of God with wonderful ardour.

We have lost, as you remark, Father B. I believe he is now at Poitiers, and I hope he will serve our Lord there, with the same zeal and benediction as when at Bordeaux. I do not hear of

any change spoken of for myself, nor do I even think it likely any change will be made, since I shall soon be incapable of being of any use. As you desire that I should be retained in this part of the world, I wish, on my part, Madame, that our Lord would grant me the favour of rendering you some service here, in what relates to the accomplishment of His designs for you. Of all that comes before my mind for the good of your soul, I have nothing so much at heart as to see you striving seriously to mortify that vivacity, of which I spoke to you in my last letter. It seems to me that to effect this is the main point, upon which all the rest depends. I know that there are other things to which you might very usefully apply your energies; but I dare affirm that this is the main matter, and that by this you ought to begin. It is true that, of yourself, you cannot get the better of it entirely; grace must complete the work in you; but you, on your part, must cooperate with grace, and that with such constant assiduity, that it must be your ordinary work, and your greatest care, to moderate continually every sort of eagerness and impetuosity, with regard to any object whatsoever, even things the most holy.

The next thing I most particularly recommend to you is, to combat all the worldly inclinations you discover in your heart; for I fear they are not all quite dead; and I fear that you have not enough courage to kill them; or enough vigilance upon occasions to stifle the sentiments, which would break forth exteriorly, in favour of these secret inclinations. Do not content yourself by an external humility which consists in compli-

ments and words only. Have that of a heart that now sees the falsity of all the grandeurs of earth and the vanities of the world. Do not wait until God, by His providence, puts you under the necessity of making acts of contempt of the world; but in the midst of honours, whilst overwhelmed with civilities, and exalted above others by human dignities and distinctions, detach yourself generously from all this in your mind. Raise yourself above this vain exaltation; trample underfoot all that the world honours in you of its own; take pleasure in certain little humiliating accidents, which God permits sometimes to happen to you, in order to assist you to detach yourself from the world.

Trust what I say, and apply yourself in earnest to this holy exercise now, whilst you are yet in the flower of life, and in a state in which you can do it both more easily, and with more merit. Do not let the best years of your life pass, without acquiring good habits. When we are old we are only fit to enjoy the good acquired in our youth. I beseech our Lord to help you by His grace to conquer all the difficulties, which oppose your good desires. Help yourself, too, by doing your own part, and do not act like those, who make their whole spirituality consist in enjoying God, and never dream of getting rid of their imperfections. To get rid of them must be a part of your care; apply the little penances you perform, and your other exercises of piety, to this end, so that, before death, you may break the bonds of your defectiveness, and attain to that pleasant freedom which the Spirit of God gives, in which we enjoy His sweetness. But as in this sweetness of God there

are different enjoyments, or rather, as there are different degrees in this most sweet enjoyment of divine grace, and as souls, that excel in purity and in humility, have an enjoyment of God incomparably more exquisite than commonplace souls: do you aspire to this eminent degree of the enjoyment of God, as the highest lot, after which the desires of the human heart can reach.

LETTER XXXIV.

To the same.

THAT THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY GHOST REQUIRES A FAITHFUL CORRESPONDENCE ON OUR PART, BY PURITY OF HEART AND INTERIOR RECOLLECTION.

The reading of those writings which you wished to have a copy of, ought to serve to the increase of your spiritual light, and to give to your soul a firm attachment to the presence of God, and such a full enjoyment of God as to prevent you from pouring yourself without, and lowering yourself to the things of earth. For although God is quite willing that we should apply ourselves to the exterior actions proper to our state, He does not choose that we should, upon that account, cease to be united to Him. When He has made a soul feel the sweetness of His grace, He wills that she should correspond to His Holy Spirit, with an inviolable fidelity. The divine Spirit dwells in us

as says S. Paul; and recollected souls, full of good will, who never permit anything worldly or earthly to enter into them, sensibly experience His presence. The means of preserving it is to suffer nothing in ourselves, which may displease Him. By this fidelity we even come at length to entertain a perpetual intercourse and a familiar conversation with God, which is the most delightful of all things. However, in order thus to correspond with the Spirit of God, there is no need of any effort, except to be faithful to shut out of your soul all that is bad, and contrary to the law, which He has written in the heart. This law each one bears within himself, and can find out, if only he chooses to pay a little attention to it. It is true that this law does not make itself sensible to all, because men, for the most part, are wrapped up in exterior objects, by an affection which captivates them, but which is sure to be followed by reproaches of conscience. Good souls feel these reproaches and give heed to them.

LETTER XXXV.

To the same.

THAT, HOWEVER DRY WE FIND OURSELVES, WE MUST NOT LET OUR HEART REST, NOR TAKE ITS SATISFACTION, IN THINGS TRIVIAL AND VAIN.

Having reflected upon our conference, I thought it would be well to tell you what had come into my mind. It is this, that I think, after all that has passed, our Lord expects of you a full determination to take that first step, without which we must ever remain in our low state. Its necessity we cannot and ought not to disguise from ourselves, when once we have become aware of it. This first step is to place the pleasure and satisfaction of the heart in God alone. I do not say that it may not sometimes happen, that we feel a certain pleasure in things that are not God; but I say that we must not suffer this pleasure to fill the heart. Divine grace and light never fail to show us, in a sweet and peaceful manner, how to act. So that God very justly expects of the soul He wishes to possess, that she should fully rest in Him only. Otherwise, whatever be her excuse, she weighs herself down, darkens and wearies herself. Thus she loses the way of grace; for this way consists in the soul's paying attention to that serene and tranquil ray of truth, which points out to her what is good in the law of her conscience, and the

guide of the heavenly life, where the Holy Spirit leads those, who are willing to be attentive to Him.

This divine ray is not always accompanied by sweetness and sensible devotion; it is sometimes very dry, either because of our bad disposition, or because it is not according to the ordinance of God, that it should always appear in its exquisite splendour. Nevertheless, though it be thus dry, the soul is bound to cleave to and to follow it. For, if she hide herself, if she fly, that she may not see it, but may enter upon her false liberty, she does then but heap trouble upon trouble, entangling herself in erring paths, and perilous bye ways, instead of travelling by the straight road. And God, by a most wise and just counsel of His providence, refuses her the sweetness and the unction, which He gives to faithful souls, and which is natural to this divine ray, since it is naught else but the attraction of grace. The soul which God punishes in this manner should suffer this pain with patience, stand firm in her holy exercises, and not give way to low gratifications, which would make her grovel on the ground. She should not make any effort to raise up in herself spiritual gusts, illuminations and feelings, for such efforts keep up the activity of the fleshly heart. Nor should she remain slothfully in a void and dry state, proceeding from carelessness and want of courage; but she should keep herself close to God, as it were, in a wide country, stretching on without bounds, desiring but the will of God, and performing all the acts of virtue to which grace inclines her as occasions present themselves.

And if, notwithstanding her diligence, she find herself still dry, let her take good care not to be willing to satisfy herself with vain things, nor take her fill of earthly pleasures, but let her rest assured that any contentment taken in such things would be to her a great evil. The important point when under such a trial, is that we should be faithful, in not satisfying ourselves by any vain thing, however small. For though we should not distress or trouble ourselves about things of little moment, yet neither must we take a vain satisfaction in the very least thing contrary to the reproaches of our conscience, because the smallest consent that we give, of deliberate purpose, to a thing contrary to grace, weakens the soul, darkens it, and turns it from the way of God. We must learn to wait for God in peace, and it is better to languish a little, dwelling with constancy in our interior, than to vent ourselves outwardly in dissipation.

I think I observed a somewhat of vivacity, precipitation, and eagerness in your mind. If that were to increase, it might prejudice you very much. You must get yourself settled in a constant evenness of mind, putting yourself in the disposition you had this last Lent. The ardour of your desires, of your actions, and of all your impulses, must be moderated. In forming plans you must not be carried away by sudden impressions, such as exterior things ordinarily make upon us; for thus they drag us into a kind of servitude. Let us strengthen ourselves well in the contempt of all human respect. Let the world say and judge as it likes of us, but let us pay no

heed to its speeches or its judgments. Let us follow the ideas of faith. Upon faith let us ground all our conduct. Let us establish in it our tabernacle and a place of retreat, never to leave it whatever may happen to us. Here is quite enough for this time.

LETTER XXXVI.

To the same.

He gives her his opinion on the design she had of making a journey to Paris, from whence he takes occasion to excite her to contempt of the world, and to perfect detachment from all the things of earth.

April 11, 1664.

You wish me to give you my opinion upon what Father Batide has represented to me, regarding your proposed journey to Paris. I think you ought to enter into yourself, and see what motive prompts you to this. There may be important reasons, to which our Lord allows you to yield. There may also be springs of self-love, which He desires should be faithfully combated. It is for you thoroughly to examine the motions of your heart. If the persons, whom you have filled with the expectation of this journey, would take it ill that you give it up; and if it be important to please them, because your influence with them might further the glory of God, this consideration I should think

of sufficiently great weight to decide the matter. But I should tell you that it is of very great importance to your soul to remain entirely free from the servitude of the world, and from all attachment to creatures. I say more, you will never be capable of satisfying our Lord, nor of doing your duty to Him fully, until you be dead to all that is called the world, and make yourself independent of human favour, seeking it only for the sake of God's glory. But if you are determined to take this journey, examine whether you will be free to withdraw from all worldly vanities, confining yourself to what is of absolute necessity. See also, when it shall be a question of giving God proofs of your fidelity, and of the little account you make of all that perishes or that does not regard His service, whether you can promise yourself that your courage will not fail you. Unless you have these good dispositions, your journey will not be pleasing to our Lord.

Reflect upon the short duration of all the grandeurs of earth. All things pass and are lost in nothingness. In my youth I saw the pomp of a king's marriage, and now I perceive that scarcely the recollection of it remains in the memory of men. The greater part of those, who were its spectators, are no longer living. They are now in another world, where all that this world has, of grandeur and attractiveness, appears to them as a very nothing. They now clearly know that hearts, which gave themselves up to be charmed by the splendour of the world, become vain. They see it, they feel it; and it is in the very light of truth itself that they see it. Faith, when it is lively,

makes us see it too; and grace, when it is strong, makes us feel it; but we shall never attain to this feeling and enjoying of truth, given us by grace, unless we make victorious efforts to withdraw ourselves from the enjoyment of all worldly pleasures. Whether we be in spiritual poverty and darkness, or we be in abundance and light, we should by an ardent faith, absolutely shake off the yoke of the pleasures of the present life; empty ourselves of all that can satisfy our senses or our mind, and persevere in this holy destitution, leaning on the one support which the heart finds in faith, resting firmly upon what it preaches to us, that to possess God we must die to all else.

Worldlings, when they are filled with the gratifications which the world gives them, fancy that spiritual persons are miserable and melancholy. These, again, in the plenitude of the divine consolations with which they overflow, esteem worldlings unhappy, in filling themselves with what is but wind, and in making that their rest, which, in spite of them, must be torn from them, and which does not lead them to God. The faithful soul, if she is in dryness, holds herself firmly between the consolations of heaven and those of earth, deprived of the former, not choosing to have the latter; but she has for her heritage correspondence with the mind of God, and the design of persevering until death in His holy service.

This, Madame, is the foundation upon which our house must be built, and our heart established. This method we must follow on occasions when our fidelity is put to the test. I beseech our Lord to give you His grace for this work. Remember

what S. Teresa says, "that the soul, that gives herself up to the service of God, is subject to great instabilities until forty years of age, but that then she should establish herself in grace."

LETTER XXXVII.

To the same, at Paris.

He commends a work of charity to her, gives her several holy counsels, and manifests to her a paternal tenderness.

Bordeaux, October 31, 1664.

I know not whether God has again willed to mortify us, by permitting that you should not have received my last letter. I think, however, that now Father Verneuil must at last have given it you. This present letter must make up for all, if you please. What has made me now write, however, is the compassion I feel for a lady of Poitou, whose virtues and excellent qualities render her very estimable; I have known her twenty years; she is now a widow, greatly ill-used by her own children, and reduced to extreme poverty. I fancy that you might find some opportunity of helping her, being on such familiar terms as you are with the richest and greatest ladies of the court, and particularly with Mademoiselle. I content myself with simply proposing this charity to you, leaving it to your discretion, and not in any way pressing you. I think Mademoiselle

could wonderfully touch the heart of our Lord, by well employing part of her great wealth, to relieve certain souls, that are truly worthy of her compassion.

For yourself, Madame, give your heart up freely to our Lord, to work in it according to His designs. Let the world be banished from your interior, and no human respect left there. Root yourself well in a true and perfect humility, that you may find the sweet presence of God, which is the seasoning of all our good works, the consolation of all our troubles, and our real happiness during the course of this life. If we are not solidly established in this holy practice of the presence of God, our hearts remain ever famished, languishing and grovelling in dark perplexity. But when, by an entire abnegation of all that is not God, we come to taste the sweetness of that presence, then we may rest assured that we have found the true life, that repose and strength which leads the soul on to the happy goal, where divine love fully satisfies the heart. To this blessed goal you are called, Madame. The great and abundant illuminations, which our Lord gives you, leave you no room to doubt of it. Prize them much, and follow them with a faithful correspondence. I confess to you that I prize them so greatly, that it is on their account my soul is knit to yours. They it is, which cause me to have so much regard for you, and make me wish, if possible, to contribute something to your perfection. God has given me such a special feeling towards you, which I cannot explain, that I would be glad to say with S. Paul: "*Nam si decem millia pæ-*

dagogorum habeatis, sed non multos patres." "If you have ten thousand teachers in Jesus Christ, yet you have not many fathers."

LETTER XXXVIII.

To the same, at Paris.

HE EXHORTS HER TO BE ON HER GUARD AGAINST THE CORRUPTION OF THE WORLD, WHICH INSENSIBLY INSINUATES ITSELF INTO SOULS, UNDER THE APPEARANCE OF GOOD.

Bordeaux, December 31, 1661.

The prayer I make to God for you at the beginning of the coming year, which we enter upon to-morrow, shall be that He would give you a spirit strong in grace, to defend you against the malignity of the world, which, as says S. John, "*is altogether sunk in wickedness,*" and against the corruption of the Court, which is the centre and heart of the world; where all there is of malice in the world is found gathered together, and where the spirit of the world has established its principal seat.

The greatest evil I find at Court, as I have already observed in the first letter I wrote you after your departure, is that, under guise of a certain goodness, civility, and a refined politeness, which brings the mind to its acme of perfection, there is concealed that which, in the world condemned by Jesus Christ, is of all things the mos

perilous, namely, an attraction which enchants the heart with the love of this present world, of its grandeurs, its pleasures, and its vain felicity. This is that sweet poison, which great Babylon gives to drink of, in a golden vessel, to those whom she seduces.

Against the charm of this attraction it is almost impossible for us to guarantee ourselves, in the life and intercourse of the Court. To explain to you my thought upon this subject, I should have to tell you what I have written, much more at length, to the Marquis de Fénelon, regarding the three colours of the rainbow, and the mystical meaning that I give them. These colours are different, and it is easy enough to distinguish them in that part of the bow where they are separated from each other. But in another part they mingle together, and run into one another in so subtle a manner, that we cannot precisely mark the point where the first joins the second, and the second the third. Here, it seems to me, we behold the symbol of three things, which present themselves every day to our mind during the course of this life, namely, the divine, the human, and the diabolical. These are manifestly distinguishable where one is opposed to the other; but where they join, they are confused together in a manner so subtle, that it is difficult to discern them, and very easy to be deceived if one has not that penetration, which grace gives to those who faithfully follow its guidance. Thus it often happens that a soul that is in quite a divine state, and desires no other, slips insensibly into a disposition that is human, on account of the close connection of one

with the other. Then, while she lingers in what is human and takes pleasure therein, the diabolical operation begins to mix itself up with it, because what is human admits of this mixture; for at one end it approaches near to God, at the other it is subject to the advances of the devil.

Now, when once this evil spirit has insinuated his venom into what is human, he openly declares himself, and infects all with his malice. What I have spoken of is to be seen in the life of the Court. There it is that the divine, the human, and the diabolical, strangely mingle, without our paying any heed to it, or taking the trouble to distinguish their various operations. That human kindness, those moral virtues, which are esteemed and learnt at Court, have their place between two infinitely contrary extremes, piety and impiety. On one side they sympathise with Christian piety, but upon the other they are allied to the malice of the devil; and by the rules of civility we would keep open the road to impiety, which, gliding imperceptibly into the heart, poisons it, and in the end corrupts even what there was there of human goodness. It is for this reason I beseech our Lord to give you a supernatural prudence, that you may have a right discernment in all these things; and the spirit of strength, that you may arm your heart against the malice of the world, and preserve it from the charms of the Court, from pomp, from vanity, and from a greedy desire of the possessions and pleasures of earth. This, then, is the wish I wish you on this new year.

LETTER XXXIX.

To the same, at Paris.

HE EXHORTS HER TO DESPISE THE WORLD AND THE EXTERNAL ADORNMENTS OF THE BODY, AND TO WORK SOLIDLY AT THE INTERIOR PERFECTION OF HER SOUL.

Bordeaux, January 3, 1665.

The peace of Jesus Christ be with you, and give you the happiness of a holy beginning of the year.

After this most humble salutation, let me tell you, that a thought of Tertullian's, coming into my mind, gives me occasion to write to you. He says in his Epistle to the Martyrs, "that the prison is the devil's house; that he keeps his family there, because there they shut up criminals; but that as for those, who are the holy Confessors of Jesus Christ, Providence has led them there, in order to brave the demon in his home, and trample him underfoot in his own house." I apply to the world what Tertullian says of the devil. The house in which the spirit of the world dwells is the Court; and the real partisans of the world, whatever the Marquis de Fénelon may say, are courtiers. Thus it may be said, that Divine Providence, if you fulfil His designs, has led you to Court to brave the world in its own home, and to trample it underfoot in its own house; and if our Lord grants you the grace to return thence,

after having conquered the world, I shall esteem you very fortunate. On the contrary, if you return, as most do, with the interior all in disorder and the soul a slave of vanity, I shall esteem this journey of yours unfortunate. That you may get the advantage of braving the world in the very heart of its kingdom, you must take instruction from the Apostle S. Peter, who, giving rules for the conduct of Christian women, commands them "not to let their adornment be in outward things, as the plaiting of the hair, embellishment of gold, and beauty of apparel, but to adorn their inner man, hidden in the heart, by the incorruptible purity of a peaceable and quiet spirit, which is rich and glorious in the sight of God." The holy Apostle wishes Christian ladies to despise the ornaments of the body, and only make account of those of the soul; for these are the only riches esteemed by God, rendering those who possess them honourable in His eyes. A Saint Francis, a Saint Ignatius, a Saint Teresa, were rich in these divine possessions, in lights, in consolations, in joys, in fulness and elevations of the heart. These are the riches of the interior man, solid and permanent, to which the Saints attached themselves, who, on that account, are called *interior men*, who enjoy a constant and even serenity. Gold, pearls, diamonds, brocade, are but the riches of the exterior man, vain and perishable; the men of the world, therefore, and courtiers, who seek after and attach themselves to these things, are *exterior men*, full of vanity, subject to inconstancy. Such, indeed, appear rich and happy in the eyes of men; but those who are established in the possession of

incorruptible goods, in a spirit of peace and sweetness; who, free from the world's tumult, the agitation and heats of the passions, seek after God, and lay up a store of spiritual treasures, they it is who are truly rich in the eyes of God.

Raise up your mind now, I beseech you, to this doctrine of S. Peter, and so fill yourself with it, that nothing of that vain exterior, which is wont to charm and dazzle the eyes, may make any impression on your heart, or turn it away from attending to the principal affair. That affair is the adorning of the interior man with the ornaments proper to him, with prayer, penance, and such like holy exercises; as also, with those other divine ornaments, which the blessed John of the Cross calls "treasures of the soul, riches of the spirit," such as are the tasting of heavenly peace, the exquisite delights of joy and consolation, and those torrents of graces, which inundate all the powers of the soul, and make them lose themselves in God. Sister Anne Marie of Jesus* could tell you more about these things, who has humbled herself for God's sake, to that degree, that I can call her my sister. She will find in her soul this precious furniture of grace, with which God enriches the chambers of His courtiers and of His favourites. I greet her, and I beg you to recommend me to her prayers.

* She was the daughter of the Duc d'Epernon, a Nun in the great Convent of the Carmelites at Paris.

LETTER XL.

To the same, at Paris.

HE SENDS HER SOME WRITINGS, AND EXHORTS HER TO DISBURDEN HERSELF ENTIRELY OF THE LOVE OF THE WORLD, AND TO FORTIFY HERSELF AGAINST THE CHARMS WHICH THE DEVIL USES AS BAITS TO DECEIVE SOULS.

Bordeaux, January 17, 1665.

I think you will have received the writings that I begged Mother of Saint Elias to send you. There is a last one, of questions upon the love of God, some of which, I fear, may shock the learned. But M. de Meur is a sufficiently enlightened master in theology to moderate what some people might perhaps consider excessive. For yourself, Madame, your theology is to despise the world in the way our Lord sees fitting for you, to dispose your soul for the virtues that shall render it pleasing in His eyes, and which could not enter there unless the world were first banished from it. The world being the open enemy of God, you should not give it any place in your heart.

You must live in the world without having either the love of the world or its spirit. You should be like that river Alpheus, which it is said passes through the sea without mingling its sweet waters with the salt waters of the sea. I wish that you may have this likeness, that you may preserve the sweetness of grace at court, where so

many others are lost, not being able to live there without tasting of its salt bitterness. Thus I term the deceitful pleasures it offers, for, however sweet they may be in appearance, and pleasant to the senses, they conceal beneath this false sweetness a venom, very bitter to the taste of holy souls, who are accustomed to the sincerity of faith, and to the simplicity of Jesus Christ.

I have already told you that the advantages to be derived from intercourse with the Court serve the devil for a subtle bait, under which he insinuates his malice into souls, that have not prudence enough to preserve themselves from it. Be afraid of his tricks, and remember always that that old serpent, whose profession it is to seduce mankind, conceals his venom beneath objects which appear seemly and innocent, beneath things which cannot reasonably be forbidden to people of the world, and which they cannot even do without. There is no artifice that he will not employ to deceive a soul like you. If he cannot entice you away from the service of God, he will at least try to render your piety languishing, and to mix some alloy in your interior action, in order that pure love may never be able to get a settlement in your heart. He may succeed in doing this, if he can only reserve to himself in you some kind of attachment and liking for the world, that world so opposed to Jesus Christ, and which declares itself His enemy, inasmuch as it holds His Cross in abhorrence, and despises the humility and simplicity, which Jesus Christ came to teach to men, both by word and example. May the good God use His powerful grace to preserve you from that

dangerous charm of the love of the world, which bewitches so many souls, and may He arm you so well against the evil impressions of the infected air of the Court, that when you return, we may have the consolation of seeing you quite disgusted with the world, and more attached to God than ever.

LETTER XLI.

To the same, at Paris.

HE SENDS HER SOME PARTICULARS OF THE HOLY DEATH OF MOTHER JANE OF THE ANGELS, AND SPEAKS TO HER OF SOME OTHER AFFAIRS.

Bordeaux, February 2, 1665.

I sent you word, by my last letter, of the precious death of our daughter, the Mother Superior of the Ursulines at Loudun. Besides what I have already told you of the holy dispositions of her soul in her last passage, I have since learnt some other particulars which mark her great union with God. The eve of her death our Lord kept her, during a considerable time, in a pain which seemed supernatural, and of which He seems to have been Himself the author. Having never, during her whole illness, given any indication of pain, she manifested an extraordinary pain by a great moaning, for some space of time, our Lord crucifying her then in such a manner, as to make her feel alike the unction of His grace, and the impression

of the pain. I am told also that after she had expired, her face wore a look of sweetness and majesty, that gave token of the holiness of her life, and her great merit before God. I believe I forgot to beg you to recommend her to the prayers of the Carmelites, with whom she was intimately united, being a daughter of S. Joseph's, and a great devotee of S. Teresa. It was upon the Feast of that Saint that God completed His deliverance of her from the possession of demons; and He willed that the adorable name of Jesus should be then engraven on her hand, where it remained so many years. But, two years before her death, she having prayed to our Lord to take away from her all extraordinary marks of His grace, the holy names of Jesus, of Joseph, and of Francis of Sales, which she bore upon her left hand, were effaced, and God took away from her all His sensible gifts, except the visits of her guardian Angel, who, even in her last illness, consoled her several times by his presence, but without giving any external sign of his presence perceptible to others. I have no doubt that you see the Abbé de Meur pretty often. I have told you the reason why I use your interposition to let him know what I have to communicate to him. You will oblige me by telling him, the first time you see him, that I received to-day the packet of books he has sent us. The messenger who brought it was drowned yesterday coming from Blaye, but some of the things were saved, and amongst others M. de Meur's packet, which we will dispose of according to his intention. The Reverend Mother at S. Elias has shown Rev. Father Meur the Treatise

on the Love of God, which I had given her to convey to you. She still attends to your son, and countenances him in the affair of his marriage. He even made a banquet one of these carnival days. He shows, however, a great aversion to all such things. May our Lord guide all according to His will. This good Mother is much bolder than I. She passes my comprehension in the undertaking of marriages. She swallows the chesnut with its peel on many times, when with me it would take all the skin off my throat. She is generous and full of confidence where I tremble.

LETTER XLII.*

To the same, at Paris.

He exhorts her to love the Cross, and to delight herself in meditating upon the Passion of our Lord.

Bordeaux, March 24, 1665.

In the conjuncture in which I find myself, namely, of the sufferings of an illness into which Providence has permitted me to fall, and of the Holy Week, in which the Church honours the memory of the Passion of our Lord, I feel myself urged to speak to you upon this subject of our Lord's sufferings, which is one we only too easily

* This is the last letter that he wrote to her, about a month before his death, already feeling the attacks of the illness of which he died.

forget, although nothing ought to be really more familiar to us, nothing being more useful. May our Lord engrave its remembrance so deeply in your mind, that you may have it always present, not only at this holy season, but all the rest of your life too. For you may rest assured, that it will make you enjoy a peace and piety that will be quite proof against the world and the Court. As the great of this world have employments and pleasures appropriate to them, with which those of the generality of men bear scarcely any proportion, so also souls that are entirely given to God, and whom He has received into His intimacy, find their joy and their recreation in things which never even cross the thoughts of others. In this rank I place the ideas of the Cross and Passion of our Lord, and the representation of all the circumstantial details of His sufferings. Nothing so removes from the soul the spirit of the world, as the forming to ourselves such a painting as this in the imagination, making of it not only an exercise, but a pleasure, so as to find in it our support, our consolation, and our strength. "*The cross of Jesus Christ is a strong staff*," says the Blessed John of the Cross. But I think that it is so for those only who know well how to use and lean upon it. For how shall we find strength in the cross, unless we accustom ourselves to study, to taste, and to feel the sufferings and shame of Jesus Christ crucified; penetrating into them by meditation, and bearing them with a brave heart when Providence presents them to us, as is often the case?

For yourself, Madame, if you cannot bur-

den yourself with crosses as generously as you would wish, you should at least have a great respect for them, and should look upon that blessed lot as the height of fortune, which leads, I do not say to crosses, but even only to the love of them. Do not despair of attaining to this, provided you can but root out of your heart the love of the world, and no longer lean on its favours, or the advantages it offers. But if you remain ever weak on that point, you will be so in everything else. The generous sentiments of the spirit of Jesus Christ will never enter into your mind; the fervour of His love will never dwell in your heart, and all our grand ideas, all our first schemes, all our good desires, will vanish in smoke. May our Lord, at this holy time of His Passion, make you to become a new creature by the virtue of that grace, which He purchased for us on the cross, at the price of His blood.

It is in Him that I am, &c.

LETTER XLIII.

To a young Lady from Poitou,

WHO HAD CONSULTED HIM RESPECTING THE STATE OF LIFE SHE SHOULD EMBRACE.

Bordeaux, June 18, 1661.

I am pleased to see you place, as you do, your heart's whole affection in the accomplishment of God's designs, and in seeking His holy will above all things. It is not so easy to know it of ourselves, nor so to learn it either from the advice of others, as not to leave room for doubt, because, when it is a question of choosing a state of life, men incline to recommend generally what is most to their own liking in the things of God. Thus you see that you have had divers counsels given you. Some have advised you to remain with the Nuns of the Visitation, others to join Madame de Chaume, in order to serve the poor; others, again, something similar. Now, these things are all good in themselves, but to discern precisely, and to tell you what our Lord desires of you, is not so easy a matter. For myself, I do not see in such a case any safer general way, than to follow the sweet and pious inclination we experience when we place our souls in a state of indifference before God, with a sincere desire for His glory.

When the soul has placed herself, as best she has been able, in this disposition, she may know the

will of God by the bent which He gives her for some state, or employment, with the view to His service and glory. I know of no better method to discover the designs that God has for us, unless He manifest them to us by extraordinary ways, which we ought not to expect. This gentle drawing, frequently given, whether for the Visitation or the work of Madame de Chaume, you might take as sufficient sign to determine you with confidence that in following it you will do the will of God. I know that many take their resolution from reasonings, weighing the motives which present themselves from this side or that. This way, however, I do not consider the best; for, in deliberations of this kind, the drawings of God and His light should have generally a prevailing influence on our mind, and give their weight to the choice we make. When once, as I have said, we have placed ourselves before God in a state of sincere indifference for all that it may please Him to inspire us with, desiring nothing but what is most agreeable to Him, resolved to accomplish it, and asking the way to know it, I consider that then we may safely attach ourselves to the object, to which we shall feel ourselves most drawn; provided that our motive be not a temporal good, or our own rest and satisfaction, but the greater service of our Lord. If you act after this sort, I believe that God will be satisfied, and you ought to be so yourself, and not seek to have some one tell you concisely, like an oracle, that God desires this or that of you. Cast yourself then humbly at the feet of our Lord. Ask of Him the light of His Holy Spirit; beseech Him that by His motion He

may incline your heart to what is for His greater glory, and I trust that, of His goodness, He will not fail to suggest to you what will be most for your advantage.

If, however, He do not give you these interior means of putting into execution the good designs He inspires you with, then you must learn to remain submissive to what He ordains, and dependant upon His providence. In this case it is for you simply to take up what shall seem best to you, making use of the counsel of good souls, and resting unresistingly in the darkness of faith, without seeking other more manifest declarations of the will of God. For the rest, my dear sister, settle yourself upon a sure foundation, establish your soul in the practice of real virtues; disengage your affections entirely from all that is not God. Go on with all liberty in what really concerns His service; seek the means of union with Him; do not cumber yourself with anything which may trouble the peace and serenity of your heart. Then, with a pure heart and a quiet mind, you may present to God those prayers and vows that are so pleasing in His sight, and offer yourself wholly to Him, as a victim devoted to His glory, which desires to be consumed in the accomplishment of His designs. Ask of Him to guide you; do quietly and generously what you believe most perfect; try to increase in His love by a frequent reception of the Holy Eucharist. To this end also mortify the senses, and curb the curiosity and vain gratification of the mind. Thus will you prepare a way for our Lord to come and rest with you; for it is a pleasure for Him to dwell in souls

that He finds empty, that are not full of plans which cause unrest, and of desires that bend towards the earth. Do not lose your time in deliberations and useless consultations; but, making your way through all the doubts which come into your mind about your state of life, advance always. Employ your time well, profiting by such occasions of exercising virtues as God offers you, so that when our Lord shall come to make you give Him an account of your conduct, your soul may be found full of merits. Moreover, I would especially advise you to have recourse to S. Joseph, to obtain light and grace from our Lord, in the perplexities you may find yourself involved in. Make in honour of this great saint, a novena of Communions, of penances, or of some other pious exercises; you will be sure to experience the favourable effects of his protection.

I am, &c.

LETTER XLIV.

To Madame de Bariere.*

IN CONSEQUENCE OF SOME CONVERSATIONS HE HAD HAD WITH HER UPON THE SUBJECT OF PRAYER, HE WROTE HER THIS LETTER, TO TEACH HER THE WAY OF RENDERING THIS HOLY EXERCISE PLEASANT AND EASY.

Bordeaux, May 26, 1662.

I feel myself urged to continue in writing the conversation we had together by word of mouth respecting prayer. A soul that aspires to Christian perfection, and wishes to taste the advantages to be found in the perfect service of God, should make every effort to give herself to prayer. Without prayer, she will only be good by halves; and she will have but half of the spiritual good she might have with it. Prayer being one of the points absolutely necessary for the well-being of a soul in the state of grace, it is of all importance that its exercise should be made easy. And, since it is the nourishment of the soul, there should not be more difficulty to us in its practice than in the taking of the nourishment of the body. God, by a wise disposition of His Providence, has made easy and pleasurable all that is necessary for the maintenance of life; and it does not accord with the

* This lady, known also under the name of Vicomtesse de Rousille, was equally commendable for her birth and for her virtue.

sweetness of His guidance, that a thing which we cannot do without should be made laborious and painful. We should go to prayer as to a repast. Some fervent souls go to prayer with the same ardour and pleasure, as worldlings have in going to a banquet or a ball. This is a most singular grace. Prayer is found easy when it is regarded, not as a fatiguing exercise, as a mental labour, but as a pleasant pastime. In order to this, however, we must approach God as His children, and use that holy freedom and familiarity, which our rank as His children gives us. He is our Creator, He is our God; we may then, without impropriety, go to Him, with the same simplicity and openness as children have, when they go to their father or mother. A little child comes into its father's presence without any ceremony, from an instinct of child-like love, from a good natural impulse, and perhaps also drawn by the trust it has in its father's goodness towards it. It comes, therefore, into the room, without preparing any complaints, and goes and places himself by his father. It remains there without other study than that of being well-behaved, and of not making too much noise. It is satisfied with being near him, staying there with respect and love. In like manner, when a soul is pure, and her conscience does not reproach her with any grievous sin, the grace of the divine adoption gives her free access to her God. "We are," says S. Paul, "of God's household. He has sent the spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba Father." We may, therefore, take the liberty not only of conversing with Him, but of doing so familiarly, as a son converses

with his father, a friend with his friend. Why then make access to God and conversation with Him difficult for ourselves, as do those who employ so much artifice and labour in prayer? They weary and distress themselves in it; it is made quite a study, or at least a business. It is true that children sometimes have business to treat of with their father; but when little, and in the simplicity of their early years, their principal business is the pleasure they take in seeing their good father, and being with their good mother. This is their life and their satisfaction.

We should go to God in the same way, simply, lovingly, with a filial confidence, not troubling, by false ideas, the peace and sweetness which are to be met with in conversation with Him. God chooses that we should deal with Him, according to the conditions of our nature. Now we are so fashioned, that our imagination is free, and moves from one object to another, as a bird which has liberty flies from tree to tree, and goes wherever it pleases. The constraining of the imagination and the violence done to it to arrest it, is what renders prayer disagreeable. If, in my prayer, I could suffer this freedom of the imagination without prejudice to the respect that I owe to God, my soul would not be wearied, it would be at peace. Now I say that this can be done, because God is an universal being, the Creator and the first source of all beings, who has put us into this world in the midst of an infinitude of objects in which He Himself dwells *by essence*, *by power*, and *by presence*. It would be our happiness if these objects, instead of turning us away from God, inclined us

to Him; and it is our misfortune that in prayer, these objects coming before us, the imagination amuses itself with them, and that is what causes us distractions. But if, amidst all this, we had an eye to God, and regarded Him in all these objects, under the confused notion of universal being, then all that might be before our eyes, or present itself to our mind, would raise us to God, and we should have no distractions. When I restrict myself to a particular idea, another particular idea is a distraction with regard to the first. But if I occupy myself with an universal idea, the particular idea which may come before me will not distract me. Now God is an universal being, to whom I can attain by a general notion, and by a general feeling; and provided I preserve in myself this disposition of mind, this view and feeling of God, in the immense extent of universal being; then, should any particular and distinct object come before me, it will not be a subject of distraction; so that, and by this means, prayer will be sweet and easy to me.

I must only take care that the distinct ideas that I have be not out of God; and it is for this cause I must view all things, at least confusedly, in God. There are souls to whom the thought of God becomes so universal and so familiar, that scarcely anything distracts them. They find God everywhere, and the universal being presents itself to them in all the particular beings. Thus nothing withdraws them from God. Prayer comes easy to them, because it is general and not limited. It is as when one plays on the lute: the great chord is struck with the thumb, and has a general

tone, which sustains the different tones of the smaller chords, in such manner that they are all good and pleasant, provided that they harmonize with this first tone. So the thought of God, when it is general, so sustains prayer, that whatever thought come into the mind, provided it accords with this universal notion of God, it is not a distraction, but a true part of this prayer, which is so much the more high and sweet, as well as less wearisome, the more it is universal.

We have, then, but to familiarize ourselves with God, and this is permitted to the penitent as well as to the innocent soul. It is enough that she have freed herself from every criminal attachment, and that she have nothing to reproach herself with which could set her wrong with God. When she finds herself thus disposed, without too scrutinizingly examining her state, she has but to humble herself before Him, and abandon herself to this general idea of God, and thus make her prayer. She need not trouble herself about the wandering thoughts which present themselves, but strive only to reduce them to this general confused idea of God. Provided that they harmonize with it, her prayer will always be good. It is not good to bind the spirit down by an oppressive constraint: it is enough to lead it gently back to the note of that first chord which intones GOD; and this chord gives forth a purer sound, in proportion as it is higher and more free. I freely confess that at the beginning a little constraint will be necessary, to prevent the extravagances of the imagination. But this pain and this toil will insensibly pass away; the habit of the presence of

God will quietly form itself, and the soul will find herself able to go to God from being drawn to Him, and to keep near to God as a little child keeps near its mother. Prayer from that time forward will cause no more pain, it will be a delicious repast, a sweet and tranquil rest, and a real entertainment.

I know some persons very subject to headaches, who find alleviation in prayer. It is this general notion of God which produces this good result, bringing with it peace, joy, consolation and all kinds of treasures. It lies with ourselves to procure this great blessing. We have only to forsake sin, to break the bonds which attach us to low and earthly things, and to establish ourselves in purity of heart; to animate our faith and to raise ourselves to the Sovereign Being. Then the practice of prayer, so dreaded by some good souls, because they know not the freedom of the Spirit of God, will no longer be difficult to us. It will become in the end even delicious; and then it may be said indeed, "*that the kingdom of God is come near to us*," on account of the ease we shall have of entering into it. There we shall taste the sweetness of conversing with God, and shall possess in abundance the riches of His grace.

It is to this, Madame, I invite you. You will find in this prayer, if you desire it, the source of all treasures and a foretaste of paradise. Madame de Ponchat will find in it her joy, her peace, and the tranquillity of her heart. She will even see that there is nothing, in all that is to be met with in her state of life, which does not help her to pray, if she only knows how to take her full

stretch in this spirit of divine liberty, for it is compatible with all that is not sin, and uses all kinds of objects to elevate and to lead souls to God. All things can harmonize themselves with God except sin: take away sin, I say, and the exercise of prayer is so sweet, so reasonable, so conformable to the natural good of man, that, not only may Mademoiselle de Rousille—who is going to become a Carmelite—pray, but also so may M. de Ponchat, like M. de Renty, with his sword at his side, going to the chase, paying visits, and performing the other duties of his state. Even your hostess cannot lawfully dispense herself from this divine conversation, which will give her a disgust for all that does not please God, not excepting that card-playing, which she fancies she cannot do without. The sweetness of prayer will make her change this pastime of play into another, holier one, the play of the uncreated Wisdom, a play in which It takes Its delight in conversing with men, and in which men find their happiness in conversing with It. Put away from you, then, the thought you perhaps entertained, that you have not the requisite dispositions for prayer. Be persuaded, once for all, that the good of the soul consists in this holy exercise, and that it is a blessing, not only the most profitable, but also the easiest and sweetest in the world, as experience will manifest to you. I wish with all my heart that M. and Madame de Pontac* may be fully convinced of this important truth. As for Mademoi-

* M. de Pontac and his wife (Madame de Barière) were persons whose virtue equalled their birth.

selle de Rousille,* I consider her absolutely won over to our side. The life which she is going to embrace, the profession which she is about to undertake, is the practice of prayer. As soon as our Lord shall have opened the door of His holy house to her, she will enter into this holy communion. She will be introduced into the private chamber of the great Bridegroom, and the treasures of grace will be communicated to her which belong to those souls, whom Jesus Christ calls to the glorious state of His spouses.

LETTER XLV.

To a young lady related to him, who was going to become a Carmelite.

He congratulates her upon her vocation, and encourages her in her good design.

Since you are so nigh upon the event, and I cannot have the consolation of seeing you, I wish to testify by this letter the joy I have in learning the disposition of your heart for the service of God. I have often made known to your father the interest I take in your happiness. I wish to make it known to yourself to-day, and to tell you

* Mademoiselle de Rousille was a Carmelite in the first Monastery at Bordeaux, of which she was several times Prioress. She is called in Religion Mary Magdalen of the Blessed Sacrament, and it is to her we are indebted for this excellent letter, of which she has had the goodness to send us a copy.

that the resolution you take of choosing Jesus Christ for your Spouse, lifts you up in the esteem of all, and ties me much more closely to you than does our blood-relationship. But this is not all. I must open my mind to you, and satisfy myself in communicating to you my sentiments on the design you have of giving yourself to God.

I beg of you, then, my dear cousin, now that you have already taken so many steps towards this, not to give yourself to God by halves. Attach yourself to Jesus Christ entirely and without reserve. Leave all your little equipments behind you; I mean, all considerations for yourself and for things most cherished by nature. Give up all generously, as encumbrances which might turn you from our Lord. Be perfectly free, so as to be able without hindrance to espouse His Cross, and to unite yourself to Him by a perfect love. Let your fervour and courage know no bounds. Disengage yourself from the things of earth, to centre all the powers of your soul on one only object, that is, on Jesus Christ, to think of Him only, to occupy yourself but with Him, to fill your soul with thoughts of His mysteries, and, above all, of His Passion and death. His Passion must be to you a garden of delights, where you may take your pleasantest recreations; and your continual work must be the imitation of the virtues of your divine Spouse. If, in this nakedness of heart and these holy dispositions, you seek to please Him, you will see how sweet He is, and how great is the heritage He gives to souls who give themselves entirely to Him. He gives to those who give, but he who gives all receives all from Him, and this

all is Himself, for He makes Himself felt and enjoyed in a manner which the tongue cannot express, nor the mind comprehend. It is important we should thoroughly believe and be convinced of this, so that we may engage ourselves the more unreservedly to Him, by a resolution high and elevated, with nothing low about it. Give all the strength of your soul, in its whole compass, to make this complete and perfect oblation of yourself to God. For upon this first step, this first effort of your heart, depends the good or ill success of the whole course of your life and the whole progress of your career. You are in the flower of your age, and nothing is wanting to you to aid you to do well. For myself, I can only contribute to it by wishing you a generous heart, firm and faithful in corresponding to the grace you have received. The measure of correspondence given should be in due proportion to the greatness of the grace received.

May the Holy Spirit, whose coming we await, touch your soul, and so inflame and consume it, that you may be henceforth animated only by Him.

In His grace, I am, &c.

LETTER XLVI.

To the Marquise d'Ars.*

HE TEACHES HER HOW WE MAY ESTABLISH OURSELVES IN THE LAND OF DIVINE LOVE.

Bordeaux, November 13, 1658.

I take up my pen, from the desire I have of conversing with you about the love and service of our Lord. I have been always seeking an opportunity, but since no special one presents itself, let us create one from the general obligation we are under of belonging to God. For I cannot remain any longer without giving you some tokens of my recollection of you. Since God has restored me the power of using my pen, I have written to so many persons of less consideration than yourself, that I can no longer defer rendering you this duty; a duty in which I promise myself that both of us will find a consolation to our hearts. My object, then, in writing, is to tell you, my dear sister, to cleave to God. We ought to attach ourselves to God by a tie so strong, so faithful and so inviolable, that no other object but Himself may be able to find place in our hearts; or if some other objects enter there;—for it often happens that the duties of our state oblige us to give an entrance to dif-

* This was a lady of Xaintonge, illustrious by her birth and by her piety.

ferent things, yet it must be by the commands of God, and for love of Him that we receive them.

The soul that, by such an union with God, wishes to settle herself in the land of divine love, must practise three points of perfection, which will introduce her into this happy dwelling place.

The first is, to relish only God in the depths of her heart, to find no repose, good or pleasure, but in God; to think of Him, to desire Him, to love Him, to seek Him in all things. God must be the sole object of her love and of her joy.

The second is, to keep up a perpetual attention to the motions of grace and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so as to follow that guidance faithfully. This interior spiritual law, conjointly with the exterior laws of the will of God, which are declared to her by the dispositions of Providence, by the commands of obedience and the doctrine of the Gospel, ought to be the governing principles of the soul. The faithful soul ever keeps her eyes fixed on the interior movements of the Spirit, to see, or rather to feel, what she ought to do. Never does she stray from that living vein of grace which is within her. Her sweetest occupation is to listen to the voice of the celestial Spouse, who, having made Himself master of her heart, has placed His throne in the midst of it, to govern, as Sovereign Master, all her powers and senses. When we are attentive to this kingdom of God within us, we possess those inestimable treasures of which S. Paul speaks, "the peace, justice and joy which the Holy Spirit gives." But the greater part of men are deprived of this happiness for want of interior recollection. They spend them-

selves without, seduced and charmed by objects which flatter the senses.

The third point of perfection is, for the faithful soul to have a continual care to practise constantly what she judges to be most agreeable to God, in all the duties of piety, of charity, and different kinds of mortification. She is ever thinking of how she may render Him a service without considering whether the thing she has to do is low or exalted, difficult or easy, repugnant or conformable to her inclination. To these things she pays no heed. She only has an eye, with S. Ignatius or S. Teresa, to choose that which is most perfect and most for the glory of God; and never does a cowardly spirit, or human prudence, cause her to leave undone anything she is able to do for God.

Thus she advances further and further into the land of holy love. She makes in it, day by day, fresh discoveries, and at length happily loses herself in its labyrinth, God seconding her fervour and filling her with His graces, in just proportion to the fidelity she manifests in His service. See, my dear sister, what it is that I wish for you, that being entirely detached from yourself, you may no longer live but in Jesus Christ.

In Him, I am your servant, &c.

I am, however, more incapable than ever of serving you, for I can now only see you by letter.

LETTER XLVII.

To the same.

THIS IS THE ANSWER TO A LETTER WHICH THIS LADY HAD WRITTEN TO HIM UPON THE DEATH OF A NUN, ONE OF HER FRIENDS, FROM WHICH HE TAKES OCCASION TO TEACH HER THE WAY TO PREPARE HERSELF WELL FOR THIS LAST PASSAGE.

Bordeaux, November 8, 1664.

I have received your letter concerning the death of Mother Poisson. This death so sudden shows with how very little confidence we ought to lean on the hope of this present life, and that we must be always ready to depart. The good Mother had written to me only a little while before, never dreaming that her end was so near. See in what uncertainty we live as to when our last day will come, and we ought therefore to live ever in dependence upon God, who calls us when it pleases Him. Nay, further, we require also a continual watchfulness to maintain our souls in a state ready at all times to receive His commands. Nothing will help more to give you this disposition, than to have a heart detached from all the things of earth, making use of them only as one who passes on his journey, not stopping for what may meet him on his road. Try, moreover, to secure a great familiarity with God, a holy habit of conversing inwardly with Him at all times, walking

in His presence in the spirit of faith, and sighing after the happy moment which will put you for ever in possession of your Sovereign Good. Think also, as often as you can, upon the life of Jesus Christ and upon His Holy Passion.

This, my dear daughter, is the preparation which I recommend you to make for death. Ask it also for me, I pray you. My natural strength is, by the grace of God, so renewed, that I have almost forgotten the ills past; and this year, which is the sixty and second of my age, seems to me to be immediately connected with the eighth—I remember that I rejoiced peacefully, in the good things that God gives to children. This autumn, which has been so beautiful, I have entirely passed in the country. I have only just come from it, and I believe that I shall return to it again until Advent. For some time since I have slept the whole night, a quiet sleep, and without interruption. It seems to me sincerely that I am like a child, on the breast of our Lord, with as little care as I had at eight years old. I have now no other cross but the sight of the wretchedness of my neighbour, and the extreme poverty of the people, which I cannot see without pain. This is to let you know that our youth is renewed sometimes like that of the eagle, after ills which might have been deemed irremediable.

Pray to our Lord that He may grant me the grace to seek no support in this present world, and to live always upon earth like a foreigner, who is occupied only with the thought and desire of his country.

LETTER XLVIII.

To the same.

WHAT SHE SHOULD DO TO RENDER A PERFECT SERVICE TO GOD.—COUNSEL FOR HER DAUGHTER, WHO ASPIRED TO CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.

Bordeaux, May 7, 1663.

Since I cannot leave my room to see you before your departure, I will make up for my visit by this letter. Let me say that to have been able to converse with you, during your stay in this town, has been to me a great joy, and I have had the satisfaction of seeing you disposed to render God a perfect service. This is not done all at once. We arrive at it step by step, and with patience, by constantly preserving the good resolution of tending to God in the most perfect manner, and often renewing it in occasions where it runs risk of slackening. It is necessary to keep under strict rule both the senses and the mind; sustaining ourselves vigorously against that heaviness, into which we fall unceasingly, from the weight of nature; never being discouraged on account of our falls or infidelities; and finally, keeping ourselves ever united to Jesus Christ by a living faith, by a tender love; and by a continual remembrance of His life, and of His death, trying to enter into His sufferings. Be faithful in practising these things, Madame, and I hope that, if God grants us

the favour of seeing each other again, the progress you will have made in His love will give me a fresh consolation.

You will oblige me extremely by giving to the Abbess of Xaintes my respects and my remembrance. As you tell me that Madame de Mazac, your daughter, has so great an esteem for me, I will take the liberty of begging her to get, day by day, nearer to our Lord: I recommend her, *first*, then, for this end, to entertain a great contempt for all that all the world esteems and seeks after; not to place her rest or satisfaction in it, but to separate her heart from it and feed it with truth. *Secondly*, always to pray a little, helping herself to pray by some good reading, and keeping up the holy practices of her retreat. *Thirdly*, to maintain in her heart an ardent charity and a zeal for good works; helping, as far as lies in her power, the good of souls and the consolation of the poor. *Fourthly*, to ground herself solidly in faith, and in a relish for piety, considering that the fashion of this world passes away, and that of all that may occupy us in this life, nothing is worthy of our esteem or care, but what may give us satisfaction at the hour of death. Upon this foundation we must establish all we take in hand. She will be fortunate, as she can have but little communication with such, as might help her in the guidance of her soul, if she is faithful to preserve the remembrance of God, making Him her delight. When you are at Loudun, encourage your dear little girl to give herself entirely to our Lord, and assure her that I will willingly give my help, for the execution of her good designs.

Will you also have the goodness to give news of us to Mother Jane of the Angels, and to tell her that Father Ricart will inform her more fully of all that concerns us, either by word of mouth, or else by the writings he will give to her.

I desire more than ever to be, with all my heart, &c.

LETTER XLIX.

To the same.

HE EXHORTS HER TO TURN TOWARDS GOD ALL THOSE MOTIONS OF THE HEART, WHICH INCLINE NATURALLY TOWARDS SENSIBLE OBJECTS, AND TO PREPARE HERSELF TO CARE ONLY FOR JESUS CHRIST, AND WHAT RELATES TO HIM. — SOME COUNSEL FOR HER DAUGHTER.

Bordeaux, July 2, 1662.

I must say that I have a great wish to see you, but I know not how to accomplish it. I will visit you in spirit; and as to-day is the day upon which the Incarnate Word paid a visit to His forerunner, which had nothing sensible about it, and the effects of which were all spiritual, I beg Him to let you hear in the depths of your heart, by His Holy Spirit, what I should like to tell you by word of mouth, to get you more and more settled, in your aim of belonging to God, in the most perfect manner. For this end, give as much as you can to grace, and very little to nature; and break the

ceaseless current of nature towards herself, turning it towards God, and not suffering her to satisfy herself in those things, after which human respect or the greediness of the senses sets her craving. Make her go always straight to the service of God, and most when beset by crosses, if God favours you with so sublime a lot. At least, get a firm habit of resisting the bent of nature, which inclines to things, that either flatter the senses, or that the world esteems. Being thus detached from low and earthly satisfactions, you will be able to enjoy the things of Jesus Christ;—His person, His actions, His words, His graces, His inclinations and His instincts; things which we only really know by recollection and a continual renunciation of self.

With regard to Madame de Mazac, I beseech you to strengthen her always in her good designs, until she be solidly established in the interior life, by a constant application to prayer, and by keeping such an exact and diligent watch over her heart, as to suffer nothing to enter there, which might displease the eyes of God.

LETTER L.

To the same.

UPON HER CHANGE OF DIRECTOR AND UPON VARIOUS OTHER SUBJECTS.

S. Macaire, February 16, 1664.

Your letter surprised me. I no longer expected an answer to that which I had written you. It is true that I have been at S. Macaire for some months, but I have no difficulty in getting news from Bordeaux. I have much joy in learning the good state of your soul. For, to speak to you frankly, of all that concerns you *that* is alone important to me, that I may fulfil the desire I have of serving you. Although I have never well understood the motive, which prompted you to change your Director, and the Mother-Superior could not tell me anything about it, nevertheless, being of opinion that in this matter the soul should be left at perfect liberty, this alone is sufficient to satisfy my mind upon the subject. I see nothing necessary but that you should belong to God in earnest, and that your soul be entirely given over to Him, as I believe it really is. That being so, all the rest is free. That you serve God well, and are satisfied, these are the two things to be considered in this affair. Since Father Fontanay is so good as to remember me, you will oblige me, Madame, by testifying my gratitude to him. We have had in

this town, until now, one of his devout daughters, of whom he formerly spoke to me, and whom he esteems highly. It is with reason; she deserves his esteem. I have just had news of the good Mother at Loudun, not very good, however, as far as concerns her health. She has a catarrh, which, like a torrent, is carrying her to her end. She would much like to see us before dying, but that depends entirely upon the providence of God, and upon a providence, which must surmount obstacles that come by its permission, or even perhaps by its designs. There are so very many of them, that it clearly appears to us, that God wills that we should let ourselves be guided by this providence in all things, and without any reserve whatever. For yourself, Madame, I should like you to be perfectly free with regard to me; I mean, either to write or not. I am equally content either way; for I hold that you belong solely to God, and that He will take care of you. As for me, we have not much longer to live upon the earth, nor does our age leave us much hope of proceeding much further; our powers, too, can scarcely stretch to more than they now do. I do not speak here of my health, which, thanks be to God, is at present pretty good, but of that vigour, without which health cannot perform great exploits. We must keep ourselves in peace, make a foundation of peace, and then build on it all our schemes and labours, aiming always to advance the glory of God as much as we can; profiting more and more in prayer, in familiarity with God, and in charity towards our neighbour, assisting the poor, and

cultivating the good of souls. We everywhere find opportunity of rendering this service to God.

In Him, I am, &c.

LETTER LI.

To Mademoiselle des Humeaux, at Loudun.

He suggests to her three excellent dispositions for keeping herself attached to the cross which God had sent her.

Good Friday, 1658.

I have had much joy in reading your letter, and in perceiving the good disposition of your soul towards God. I have never forgotten you in my great troubles, and I have always had the same affection for you, and the same zeal for your good, and for your progress in the love of our Lord. I hold you happy in sharing His cross, and in having received this heritage directly from Himself, by His providence. You cannot do better than inwardly submit yourself to Providence, and correspond faithfully to grace, as I see you do, receiving all that befalls you as from the hand of God, referring all to Him, humbling yourself, and enduring willingly that those, who would wish to help and console you, burden and insult you. This view of the ordinances of God, and this submission which we pay to Him, is the source of all the riches of our souls, and the channel of the

communications of the Holy Spirit, and of the divine love, which grow in us, in proportion as we are faithful, in conforming ourselves to the will of God. Do so, then, I beseech you; look at the submission which Jesus Christ paid to His Father; unite yours to His, and never let your heart be steeped in any other feeling. Afterwards, the Holy Eucharist, which produces this perpetual dependance upon God in us, will be the nourishment and the permanent support of your soul, and your interior occupation will be to converse unceasingly with God, delivering yourself up to Him, neither enjoying nor desiring any but Him alone. Submission, fidelity, fervour of devotion, will be the three nails, with which you will remain fastened to your cross. I beg you to put into the hands of Mother Jane of the Angels the Meditations, which I gave you for a Retreat, in order that she may have them transcribed for me.

I am, &c.

LETTER LII.

To M. Gilles, tradesman at Marennes.*

HE GIVES HIM, IN THE FIVE FOLLOWING LETTERS, VARIOUS COUNSELS FOR ESTABLISHING HIMSELF IN INTERIOR PEACE, AND IN RECOLLECTION.

Loudun, November 6, 1635.

I thank you for your charity and for your remembrance of me. The remembrance of you is deeply impressed upon my heart, as also that of all your family. I entreat you all, as strongly as I can, to love God with all your hearts, and to bear well in mind these three things; *first*, that the good things of this world pass very soon, and that there follow other good and other evil things, which never end; *secondly*, that God has done and suffered for your salvation inconceivable things, that He ardently desires you should save your souls, and that His greatness and His goodness well deserve, that we should wholly apply ourselves to serve and please Him; *thirdly*, that whatever wretchedness we feel within us, whatever failings we have, whatever hindrances to our salvation we experience, we must never lose courage, nor give up our good designs. One of the commonest wiles of the devil is to take occasion of our weaknesses to make us abandon the path of virtue. I

* This was a man who lived in great Christian perfection.

speak to all of your household, to your dear wife, to your children, to your servants, but particularly to you, who should uphold the whole family by your good counsels and your holy example. I shall never forget your soul, I assure you. I feel under too great an obligation to take care of it.

I am, &c.

LETTER LIII.

Bordeaux, April, 4, 1637.

It is well that I put you in mind of the conversation we had together, last time you were here, about your state. We must get in our soul such a firmness of spirit, as may prevent the disorderly motions of nature from passing their boundaries, and inducing us, under any pretext wht soever, to do anything in their favour. This is the way to establish ourselves in peace, which is the solid foundation, on which we should, with the help of grace, build the sublime edifice of our perfection. Let us guard more jealously this peace than anything else in the world, even reason itself. Hold it for certain that God expects from you such a constant evenness of mind, that, even if tossed about without by every chance, and agitated within by every passion, you should still not give way to any motion contrary to the divine law, and to the perfection He has made known to you by His divine light. You will do no little thing, if you accomplish this, now that you are despoiled of the

sweetnesses and consolations of grace, and of that sensible vigour which you formerly had. For by this means the work will become solid. Fear nothing, I beseech you, but preserve inviolably the good purpose of repressing all the impetuosities of nature, and give no place to one, even though it should seem as if everything within you were on the point of exploding.

Be assured that your labour will be well repaid. Recommend me, if you please, to the prayers of your dear wife; tell her from me to keep herself in true interior peace, and in perfect resignation to the will of God in all things. Farewell, Sir,

I am, &c.

LETTER LIV.

Bordeaux, May 17, 1637.

I have already written to you by way of Xaintes. Since then I have received your letter. I think that you will reap much profit in the service of God, if you continue faithfully to resist all these impetuous and disorderly motions of the heart, which would disturb your peace, paying no attention to what they would persuade you, but only to what you are urged to by motives of virtue, or what the truths of faith suggest. Lean more upon faith than upon the good sentiments, which either come to you now, or which have in former times consoled you.

It is a great thing when a soul, deprived of

the gusts and sweetnesses of grace, still constantly observes what the light of God teaches her, mortifying her passions solely to please Him, and that she may be enabled to love Him. The desire of getting this divine love should be firmly established in your heart; and as it will never enter there, if it does not find it pure and peaceful, you should, from this desire and motive, put away from you all kinds of sin, small as well as great; preserve a serene peace in all the various accidents of life, letting passion murmur within, but not doing or saying anything to satisfy it; stifling the inward impetuosity it produces, and behaving outwardly as though all in your heart were just the contrary of what is really there. It is thus that a solid edifice is built, and that little by little true virtue is acquired. That you may keep up this practice, consider the truths of faith, and take them for the rule of your conduct. Take, for instance, the thought of eternity, and those great maxims of Jesus Christ, "*that before all things the kingdom of God and His righteousness must be sought, and that all the rest shall be added to it; that God will judge all the actions of men,* and will examine them according to the rules of the Gospel; that He communicates a great abundance of interior gifts and spiritual riches to those, who give themselves up to true devotion.

Such maxims as these should be your support in your whole conduct of life, and by this means you will, be assured, acquire great spiritual treasures. I hope to see you in a few weeks.

I am, &c.

LETTER LV.

Poitiers, August 29, 1637.

The frequent combats in which we find ourselves engaged during this life, oblige us to be always on our guard. This vigilance consists in our not wandering out of the way of God, or turning aside to creatures, in the various events which befall us. If the heart is not satisfied, if the soul is not determined to be guided by the truths of faith, it is impossible but she will allow herself to be overcome. But it ever comes to this, that God judges very differently from men, and what is very brilliant in their eyes is insignificant before God. Thus, when His judgment-day arrives, there will be found many that have been deceived. It will be acknowledged then "*that the number of fools is infinite*," and that the truly wise are those alone who follow the maxims of Jesus Christ effectually, being sincerely detached from the things of earth, and resigned wholly to the will of God, to be poor, dishonoured, and forsaken, if He choose that they should pass through these trials. For all these things being of short duration, are of no great importance. We must then rest ourselves in great peace upon the good pleasure of God, and upon His providence. We must have a firm resolution of doing our duty to Him, and of preserving His holy grace in whatever situation He may place us, patiently bearing the wrath of our enemies,

and the agitation of our passions, without permitting to them any vent, and without excusing them, under any pretext whatsoever. For there are always plenty of excuses to bring forward, which appear just and reasonable. But peace of conscience is worth more than all the rest, and the agitations of the passions only serve to give the devil a great advantage over us, for the success of his plans and the darkening of the soul.

The way to acquire a peace so precious is to despise all fleeting things. If this be not done, it cannot be attained. Another important point for your direction, is not to pay much attention to the various feelings of your heart; such as are disgust for certain things, aversions for certain persons, good or bad humour. Pay but very little attention to all things, which are only in the inferior part of the soul. But always go straight to what reason prescribes for you, and you will by this means get yourself into a settled way, in which you will find true light, perfect wisdom, solid rest, and perpetual joy.

I greet your dear wife. Tell her, that whatever happens, I hope she will not cease to trust in God and to serve Him. She should not seek her consolation in creatures, but try to acquire true peace, by the mortification of all her passions, so that both of you, being free from their slavery, may serve our Lord with one same heart.

LETTER LVI.

Bordeaux, May 19, 1658.

Our Lord having restored to me the power of writing, the thought of you has come to my mind, and the old ideas of our friendship. It is not that I have not often thought of you in my great troubles; but I should wish now to give you tokens of my recollection, and to recall to you the remembrance of our old pious observances. I beg of you then to hold fast in your heart the sentiments God gave you, when He inspired you with the idea of serving Him in earnest.

They are, first, a great affection for all things relating to piety, frequent thoughts of our Lord, a great respect for the Blessed Sacrament, a great devotion for the holy Virgin, and the practice of some good exercises in her honour; secondly, a perfect detachment from worldly things and earthly treasures, only liking them moderately, only using them as dependent upon God, and in the order of His providence; not dreading their loss over much, and proceeding in this life as a traveller; being confident that God will not fail to provide for all your wants, or to give you patience in your adversities: thirdly, a special care to keep your soul in peace, unagitated, and passionless; being well persuaded that we never give way to passion, without its casting a shadow over our reason, the soul being darkened and oppressed by it. So keep your

peace always, at all costs, and never lose it under the pretext that others give you just cause for anger. By this means the soul being ever calm, she is well prepared to converse with God, and to practise charity towards our neighbour, whether by forgiving the evil done to us, or by bearing the faults of the persons, with whom we have to live. Without charity we cannot please God, and to preserve it the heart must be at peace. Reflect upon all this, Sir, I beg of you, and believe me to be, &c.

LETTER LVII.

To M. Dussault, Counsellor to the Presidency of Guienne.*

UPON THE OCCASION OF THE FEAST OF S. TERESA, HE SPEAKS TO HIM OF THE EFFECTS WHICH DIVINE LOVE WORKS IN THE HEART, IN ORDER TO BRING IT UNDER ITS DOMINION.

Bordeaux, October 15, 1662.

We must not let the feast of S. Teresa and its Octave pass, without reflecting upon the grace which heaven offers us in the example and merits of so great a Saint, for whom I consider that all those, who would give themselves to the love of our Lord, ought indispensably to have a special devotion. Indeed, Sir, we must not suffer the lightnings of grace and divine love, with which this

* This was a worthy and virtuous man, his intimate friend.

seraphic soul was consumed, to pass before our eyes, without being in some measure affected by it, each one according to his capacity. When a soul is struck by it, a perfect conflagration takes place in her, her original form being first quite destroyed and annihilated.

This powerful grace which breathes only fire and love, burns and consumes all that it finds that is human and imperfect, all that opposes that love, which it conducts with it, as a conqueror, to triumph over the hearts of men. It overthrows all the fortifications, which material and sensual love has raised. It breaks down the barriers and beats in the doors of our obstinacy, which are those habits and ways of acting, which are called our own, because they proceed from ourselves, and not from God. It overthrows all maxims contrary to the simplicity of the Spirit of God, determinations formed by our own will, and founded upon the old habits of our nature, which seeks to satisfy itself and to act according to its own fashion. To these determinations we are extremely attached, because suitable to our custom and manner of acting.

When these are overthrown, the last palisade erected by self-love takes fire, namely, our natural activity, which we show on all occasions. When grace has once rooted it out, and reduced it to ashes, then the celestial fire becomes lord, and reigns absolutely in the soul. It goes from room to room, running through all the faculties. It consumes all of self that remains in them, all sentiments, views, affections, inclinations, and instincts of self. It beats down all secret resist-

ances, and changes everything into the uniformity of the divine love. The soul possessed by this fire, penetrated by this love, feels an extreme tenderness and ardour for God, together with a surprising familiarity with Him. God, upon His side, no longer finding anything in the soul to render her unpleasing in His eyes, delights in dwelling with her, and wins her by His beneficence and by His sweetness. He gives Himself to her, having nothing better to give her. He comes to her as a bridegroom, to cheer her and to caress her with His consolations. He instils into her an intimate perception of His goodness, which the soul feels within herself, and tastes fully by virtue of that sacred fire which consumes her. Nay, more; by the grace of this same fire, she sees all created things and all the wonders of the divine power, in a totally different light to that, in which she formerly saw them. She discovers in them what she had never perceived before, the rays of the first original sensible vestiges of the perfections of God, of His goodness, of His majesty, of His strength, of His justice. All objects that come before her, from whatever quarter, give to her new illuminations for knowing God more, and fresh ardour for loving Him. There is no one but ought to wish for this loving communication, which God desires to have with the soul, for it is a most excellent means of knowing and serving Him purely and perfectly. We must conceive this desire like the admirable Teresa; and, in imitation of her, strive to reach that happy state, in which we may render a perfect service to God, in the purity of His love. Let us exert all our industry to this

end; let us purge our hearts of all that oppose these holy flames, of all in us that is sensual and earthly, holding it for certain that the least attachment to creatures, one single glance of esteem cast upon them, the taking of the least enjoyment in them, however momentary, is enough to prevent us from possessing this happiness. Let us begin, then, with the grossest hindrances, stifling in ourselves all those movements, that chill the heart, and render it less capable of enjoying God. Let us, then, set to work to cut off the more subtle hindrances; and, without amusing ourselves by taking much notice of them, banish generally from our interior all that does not serve to unite us more closely to God. In order to succeed well, let us unceasingly ask of God the light and help of His grace. What I write here to you, I say to all the members of your family. Please assure them of this.

I am, &c.

LETTER LVIII.

To the Abbe du Tour, Chaplain to the Prince de Conti.

OF THE PRINCIPAL POINTS UPON WHICH DEPENDS THE PROGRESS OF THE SOUL.

I was much surprised not to see you here with His Highness. I had greatly hoped to have had this consolation, so as to be able to speak to you from my heart. I must supply by writing what I have not been able to tell you by word of mouth. I would most then at present wish to make you understand, that the spiritual advancement of our souls is to be found in the vigour of our faith, which draws us away from the attachment we have to earthly things. As all these things are either pleasant or annoying, they occupy our minds either by the charm they have for us, or by the pain they cause us; and in this way they prevent or diminish the attention we ought to give to the things of faith. Our whole good consists in our so attaching ourselves to these things of faith, that they really touch us, occupy, and fill us. Now, their effect is weakened by the pleasure or pain we receive from sensible things.

The whole study, therefore, of souls aspiring to perfection, reduces itself to two points. The first is to prevent things present from making that im-

pression, which they ordinarily work upon the mind. We must never allow ourselves to be affected, in a purely natural manner, by passing things. We must mortify all eagerness felt for any other object than God; and when we permit our energies to be active in things which regard His service, we must still so deal as to have no motive but the interest of God and His holy will. This motive never makes the soul act with precipitation, nor withdraws her from her repose. The second point is, by means of this perfect repose, well established in our souls, to apply all our strength and all our care to the work, exterior or interior, which we are doing for God. We should ever fall, as though by our own weight, upon the good things of God; or better, we should raise ourselves up to God continually by His help. To have three or four things greatly at heart will again help much to this. First, to have so great a purity of conscience, as immediately to correct all that we see in ourselves, that is either bad or imperfect, not letting ourselves be seduced by the deceits of self-love. Secondly, to have a continual turning of the heart towards God, to find in Him our rest and our satisfaction, by having Him, and His presence, or that of Jesus Christ, always in our thoughts. We should have for this end some imagination of God, or of our Lord, always in the mind, which may keep up the fire of divine love, so as to prevent our heart from following the bent of its former habits, and from going to rest itself in some low and earthly object. The third point is to have the sublime practice of the abandonment of ourselves into the

hands of God, to be guided by His providence just as it shall please Him, being prepared for all kinds of events, reverses, confusions, and crosses; or even having a special inclination for crosses, in consideration of the cross of Jesus Christ, and from respect to His adorable person, which received such strange treatment from men; in fine, valuing nothing so much, amid the various purposes of Providence, as those things which make us like to Jesus crucified. Fourthly, we must have an assiduous care to permit no void in our soul, but keep it always quietly attentive to something good, either by being employed without in works of charity, or occupied in a holy manner within; banishing from our interior that miserable void, which we find within us, when we are filled with self. This, Sir, is what the passing of the Court through this town has given me occasion to say to you, to prove that I remembered you, and that I am truly, &c.

LETTER LIX.

To Mother Jane of the Angels, an Ursuline at Loudun.

COUNSELS FOR THE DIRECTION OF THE YOUNG PROFESSED, OF WHOM SHE HAD THE CARE. THESE COUNSELS ARE SUITABLE FOR ALL SOULS, WHO BEGIN TO GIVE THEMSELVES TO GOD.

November 17, 1658.

As our Lord has given you the direction of the Novices and of the young professed, I thought, my dear daughter, it would be pleasing to Him, that I should say something, that may help to their spiritual advancement. Several of them even have written to me to ask me for advice. Thus I think it will be well to give one answer to all, whence each in particular may derive instruction and help. It appears to me that their whole well-being depends upon their first project and idea, when they enter the service of God; for if this first project is mean, all their work will be the same, and their advancement accordingly. Their design should be to give themselves perfectly to God, and to attain to the end that our Lord had in view for them, when He called them to Religion. Now, the end which He contemplated in withdrawing them from the world, was to entirely possess them, and to have them at His disposal, so as to communicate to them at His pleasure the excellent treasures of grace. But He wills that each

soul shall use all diligence on her part, to deserve what He designs to give. He is resolved not to give this largess to cowardly souls, that are still irresolute in His service; otherwise He would do wrong to His wisdom. Thus, the capital point of our enterprise is to establish ourselves solidly, in this resolution and determination, of belonging altogether to God. To this end we must lay it down as a primary principle, that it is in our power, with the grace of Jesus Christ, to be happy in giving ourselves to God in a good way; namely, by not allowing anything within our hearts intentionally, and of deliberate purpose, such as may displease Him.

To belong altogether to God, it is not necessary to determine to perform great penances, nor to make long prayers, nor to undertake great works, nor to endure excessive pains, but rather not to suffer voluntarily in our heart any attachment to any creature, to the prejudice of the love of God. We cannot then excuse ourselves under the pretext that we have not health, or that we are deficient in intellect, or some other talent; especially when Religion frees us from all exterior cares, so that we need only to know our obligations, and to have a good will to accomplish them. Let us make it our aim to do this work; and, though we may have some trouble in conquering our evil habits, and natural inclinations, this trouble we may not excuse ourselves from. God asks of the faithful, that they keep His commandments. Can they dispense themselves, under the pretext that their health does not allow them to keep them, or that they have contrary inclinations?

Not at all. If He asked of them great fasts or rigorous austeries, they might allege, as an excuse, their weakness and want of health. It is just the same with regard to persons in Religion; they can dispense themselves from exterior rules, when their infirmities render them incapable of bearing this yoke; but with regard to the interior, which is the point of which I speak, none can excuse themselves; and no wrong is done us, when we are told to attach our hearts solely to God, notwithstanding the repugnance of our natural inclinations, and bad habits.

Then let these souls, that enter the service of God, make up their minds that they will have neither rest nor real satisfaction, unless they determine to make their joy consist in the accomplishment of the will of God, giving themselves to our Lord in such sort, as to suffer nothing in their hearts which displeases Him. This you must strongly impress upon the minds of your daughters, getting them to take this generous resolution, and charging them to probe their hearts on this point, in their prayers and examinations of conscience. It is necessary for them to examine themselves, to learn as to what things they still be attached to, and in what they are still irresolute; to cast themselves at the feet of our Lord to ask Him for strength and courage; as also, and for the same end, to make use of the help of obedience, and of the direction of those, who stand to them in the place of our Lord. It is certain that, when we give ourselves to God, we do it generally with a thousand limitations: *I will give myself to God, provided I have such and such a person near*

me. If I had that employment, I would serve God perfectly, &c. Let us not deceive ourselves: is it truly the desire of pleasing God, or that of gratifying ourselves, which makes us speak in this manner? Let us find out what it is that suggests these things to our minds, and in proportion as God discovers the deceits of self-love to us, let us combat our inclinations one after the other, until we have reduced them all to the sole desire of pleasing God. To this end we must have a lively faith, a great desire of our salvation, and a great contempt for all else, esteeming the present goods of nature as nothing, compared with the eternal treasures of grace.

This, my dear daughter, is the first foundation upon which these souls must be established. Then, when they are well grounded, they must gently, and with love, be made to go on to perfection. No secret understandings or compoundings with self-love are to be permitted, which would leave the passions at liberty, and allow nature to seek for her gratifications. Above all, prevent their linking themselves in particular friendships, with whomsoever it may be; for all these familiarities, these confidences, these human supports, are but vain amusements which ruin virtue.

Jesus Christ must be loved alone, and others for love of Him, when their communication, their conversation and their intercourse lead us to Him. The reason we see, in Religious life, cowardly, slothful persons, who are always asking for what is agreeable to self-love, is because such have never formed this true idea of loving God, and of doing His holy will. They have never thoroughly mas-

tered the fact that the will of God declares itself in all things, in obedience, in regular observances, in the economy of the household, in the practices of virtue. *It is the will of God that you sanctify yourselves.* This sanctification is fulfilled by our esteem and love of God, and our seeking every moment to do what we judge most pleasing to Him.

For this He gives us His lights and His inspirations, which He wills that we should follow. He lets me know that it is His will, that I resign myself to what He ordains, that I abandon myself to His providence, that I desire nothing too ardently, that I resign all my wishes into His hands. To this I must school myself, to mortify all my desires, and make my heart indifferent; for as long as I have some plan in my head, some wish in my heart, for example, to see one of my relations or some other person, I shall never be entirely resigned to God, nor satisfied with Him alone. This is our misery, that we do not recognize the treasures which are in God, nor the evils that are in ourselves. We do not reflect that death will come one of these days, and will despoil us of all. Happy those souls that have anticipated it, and have stripped themselves of all beforehand! O how sweet to them will be the meeting with Jesus Christ! and how confused and trembling will be that of the others, when they see the purity He desired of them; what violence He expected them to do to themselves. They will see how much they have deceived themselves, how deluded they have been, always thinking others were in the wrong, and never acknowledg-

ing their own faults, although they have always continued in their immortifications in all things, not willing to sacrifice to a God, who has given His life's Blood for them, some silly trifle to which they were attached. We should consider deeply, and make our meditations upon these things. This is the fruit we should gather from our retreats, otherwise time is lost, and life passes away, whilst we amuse ourselves most pitiably. May God of His mercy enlighten us.

LETTER LX.

To the same.

OF PERFECT SELF-ABANDONMENT, SO AS TO BE WHOLLY POSSESSED BY GOD.

December 20, 1658.

I should like, my dear daughter, to be able to make you see how important and advantageous it is to the soul, to give herself entirely to God. We must bear in mind that the well-being and perfection of a man consists in his being filled by God, and in his having God for the first principle of all his actions. This is brought about by grace; and the more man is submissive to grace, the more beneficially he participates in the happiness of being, in all things, filled by God. Now he cannot attain to this easily, on account of the corruption of nature, which rebels against this perfect

submission to grace. Thus, when the soul has once determined to belong altogether to God, she must, with her own efforts, assisted by grace, mortify all she finds in herself contrary to God, such as vices, passions, impetuosities, and generally all that passes for disorderly in the opinion of wise men.

After all this, there yet remains to her one thing to mortify, which is commonly unsuspected, and which is nevertheless a great obstacle to perfection. This is her own action or her manner of acting of herself; a defect common to all good people, of whom God has not yet taken entire possession. The good they do is generally done of themselves, aided, of course, by grace, without which nothing good can be done. But grace is not predominant in them. I call it predominant when it is so completely the first motive principle of the action, that there is nothing in the action in which grace has not its part and influence, so that man does not perform it in his own way, but according to the way of God, God moving and filling him altogether, as the air fills all the void places of nature. This is difficult to explain in such a way as to satisfy all learned men, but simple persons will easily grasp it. When the soul submits to grace, God thenceforward insinuates Himself into the mind, into the heart, into all the faculties, into all the natural principles and workings of the soul, becoming their primary mover. We have but to consent to let ourselves be moved, and it is done without constraint or oppression. The soul is ravished to find that God does all things with her, as though

He alone were acting. She joyfully keeps herself in this dependence, which perfects her and puts her in possession of the fulness of her being and life. She makes no distinction between what God works in her and what she works with God; just as he who, having taken nourishment, and set himself to work, when he feels a strength and vigour which before he had not, does not discriminate between his natural strength and the new vigour which has been communicated to him; he only makes use of the good state, in which he finds himself, to apply all the more diligently to labour.

Thus, when man is wholly possessed by God, he draws from Him new life and strength, which enables him to act gently and forcibly in all his actions, without experiencing any resistance within himself. Even those things, which come on him from without, harmonize with his interior, on account of his resignation to the ordinances of Providence, so that in all things he is happy, and turns all to advantage. Before the soul be thus perfectly dependent upon God, she suffers every time she wills to act in her old way, and of herself. Sometimes God lets her do as she likes, in order that she may experience how weak she is in herself; then He raises her up, and conducts her until she learns to unite herself entirely to Him. To attain to this happiness, we must beat down our natural activity, strip ourselves of our low and human way of acting, be attentive to God in all things, accommodate ourselves and submit to the interior movements of grace, when we are aware of them. The soul discovers these movements when

she is quiet and at peace, and she acquires this peace and this tranquillity, by studying to die to self and to her own schemes. When she is perfectly dead to her own ways, God works in her all kinds of good. He takes pleasure in playing with her, so to speak, and He works all kinds of things in her, now things that purify, now what crucify, now what glorify. She sees the kingdom of God established in her, with the righteousness, peace and joy, which the Holy Spirit gives. She walks in the pure light of truth; she burns with the fire of divine love; she perceives the rectitude and freedom of grace; all her powers are crowned with the blessings of God. The body even experiences it, and is happy to be possessed by God, who governs it and sanctifies it in a manner more incomprehensible than all the rest, more ravishing and more delighting to the mind. The soul is surprised to see that God abases Himself so far, and that, to become Lord of all, He deigns to attend to the direction of the lowest part of man.

It is chiefly by the Holy Eucharist that this is done in a more positive and more penetrating manner. The Holy Sacrament is the interior principle of this divine life, and it is by the Holy Communion that we find we attain to the happiness of being wholly and perfectly possessed by God. We cannot, then, do better than hasten to mortify in ourselves all that opposes so great a good, and tell our Lord frankly that we wish Him to be master of all; not considering our own interests, nor what might gratify our natural inclinations. When a soul says this from her heart, and God sees this constant will in her, He takes

her at her word, and, taking her out of her own country, He leads her into the land of sufferings, and then into that of His love. He tries her by great troubles, to prepare her to be conducted by Him. He makes her die to her nearest and deepest interests, to enable her to receive the life which He wishes to communicate to her. Finally, she finds it is well for her to have delivered herself up, and abandoned herself to Him without reserve, and whatever pain this divine Physician makes her suffer, she reaches a state in which she forgets all her woes. It is the kingdom of God, in which the enjoyment of all treasures is to be found. May you obtain it.

LETTER LXI.

To the same.

ADVICE FOR THE COMMUNICATIONS SHE HAD WITH HER GUARDIAN ANGEL. HOW EXTRAORDINARY GRACES MUST BE RECEIVED.

January 22, 1659.

A priest, holding a dignified position, has complained to me of your conduct, my dear daughter, in that you keep a sort of enquiry office open to everyone, where they come to ask you what they wish to know, by means of your good Angel; that you consult him upon all kinds of things, and even about marriages, trials and other temporal affairs;

and that you then retail the answers you receive from him. It is said that this is contrary to the order God has established for our ordinary direction, for which reason and faith suffice.

Now as it was said that I did not approve of this, I replied that it was true I had not myself applied to you, to learn anything in particular from your holy Angel; but still that I was not aware of your having done anything, but what might legitimately be done, and that I considered that, without offending against the rules of faith, we may, upon certain occasions, obtain light from the extraordinary ways, of which God appears to be the author.

I beseech you, my dear daughter, to take care to put no questions to your holy Angel, such as may seem merely to gratify the curiosity of the human mind, or be injurious to the common law of Christians. It is true that Father Batide has often wished to persuade me, that it would be a good thing to interrupt the intercourse you have with your holy Angel; but I consider that this Father carries his doctrine of resisting extraordinary things to excess. For myself, I think that God often makes great gifts to souls through them, and that it is a means He has established, with regard to some few, which is very beneficial for them. I consider that, since He gives them, He chooses that they should be made use of and profited by; we receiving them with abnegation of mind, not amusing ourselves with them, but going straight to God, and taking our stand in Him alone. I think it is better to believe that God gives His gifts simply to His children; and

He does not take pleasure in those philosophical reflections of refusing what He gives, nor in those observations which proceed from the human spirit, and do not bear on them the character of the Divine Spirit. Provided that His children love Him Himself, and not His gifts and His caresses only, He is very glad that they make use of all that He gives in their favour. By choosing to go too far off, they remain in their weakness and poverty, instead of enriching themselves by the presents of God, as they might do.

I have never read in the lives of the Saints, that any of them pursued any other conduct, than that of carrying their heart straight to God, making use of His favours and special graces. There have been found some, who have refused the visitation of Angels. But a general law must not be laid down from particular examples. It is true that there is a state in which the soul, finding herself alone with God, can endure nothing but Himself. This is when God manifests Himself completely. S. Bernard testifies that he sometimes found himself in this state, and that he then felt disgust even for visions of Angels. But ought we to conclude from this, that visions of these blessed spirits should always be rejected, and all similar graces? If I am told that it is in order to free ourselves from illusions, which may slip into these kind of things, I answer that, provided we are faithful in seeking only God, He will not permit us to be deceived by the devil, who can transfigure himself into an Angel of light, and counterfeit several effects of grace. I say more: if even the devil were to work one of these extra-

ordinary effects in a soul, they will do her no harm, if she receive them without attachment. For it is not so important, (as might be imagined,) that the devil can counterfeit some graces, as it is important that the soul should lean upon nothing but God.

Mother Agnes says, that in the letters, in which I invite you to the possession of the treasures of the kingdom of God, to which grace calls us, I propose a state, which belongs not so much to the present as to the future life. I beg you to tell her that our Lord does more than can be possibly imagined, when a soul is altogether His; and although it may seem to her, that what I have written about it is overstrained, let her know that it is not more so than what S. Teresa says of it, in the Castle of the Soul, in the seventh habitation. What I have said of it is not said to attract souls by self-love to this happy state; it is to manifest the riches of God, and what may be hoped for from Him, when we renounce all to be His. There are persons in whom these graces only pass like flashes of lightning, but there are others also in whom they are permanent, and become as it were an ordinary state; so that, if they are not in the continual enjoyment of these celestial delights, they are scarcely ever far from them, and the slightest occasion makes them return to them. Whoever has read the "*Ardent Flame of Love*" by the blessed John of the Cross, and the treatises of some of the Saints, will have no difficulty in believing what I say. Let me say, then, to this good Mother, that God does more than she thinks, when we give ourselves liberally to Him.

Let us only truly live in the practice of real virtue, and we shall see that God will do more for us than our mind can conceive.

I recommend little Mademoiselle d'Ars to your care, and I beg you to impress upon her understanding how great are the treasures that lie hid in self-renunciation, and in the abandoning of all things into the hands of God, to walk in the nakedness of faith, as she has been taught.

Believe, that I am, &c.

LETTER LXII.

ANSWER OF MOTHER JANE OF THE ANGELS TO THE PRECEDING LETTER.

February 16, 1659.

My dear Father,

You will receive two of my letters at the same time: for I had written the first some days, when yours of the 22nd of January was delivered to me.

I thank you most humbly, my good Father, for the great mercy you show me in warning me, and I beseech you, by the love of our Lord, to continue this favour to me, and to instruct me how I ought to behave upon like occasions: for I promise you, in the presence of God, that, with His help, I will observe faithfully whatever you prescribe for me. As to the past, I will tell you simply how I acted, with regard to the things I have been asked to

recommend to my holy angel. I tried, when I remembered, to present the wants of those who had applied to me, to him; and I begged him to enlighten them according to the will of God. Sometimes he had the charity to reply in a few words what they ought to do. At other times it has seemed to me, that I received some illumination, which threw light upon the affair in question, and I have given the answer, as though it were a feeling I had had. Sometimes it has been conveyed to me, that it was not pleasing to God to answer; I have never propounded anything, that was not subject to the good pleasure of God, and in a quite indifferent frame of mind. I do not know that I have recommended to Him marriages or lawsuits, but upon three or four occasions. If you judge that it ought not to be done, I will never again do so, in either of these matters. If Father Anginot, Father Batide and yourself, after having recommended the thing to God, judge it well that I oppose the visits of my Angel, and the renewal of the holy names, which I bear on my hand, I am quite ready to do so. I will pray to God to stop all these things, and will ask Him with so much affection, that I hope, of His goodness, He will grant me my request.

I assure you I am quite prepared to do in this matter whatever is thought best: for my God knows that I want only Him, and that all else is nothing to me. Then see, with these good Fathers, what the Holy Spirit may inspire you, and write me word as to your daughter, who desires to obey, and to be content with all that God wills. Consider whether I ought to abstain from praying to

these blessed spirits, in favour of persons who apply to me for the good of their souls, or whether I ought to break off all intercourse with them. In fine, act with all freedom, and take from me what you will: my God remaining to me, I shall be sufficiently rich. And, to speak to you in all sincerity, in whatever state I may be, of poverty, of misery, of weakness, of impressions of evil and of temptation, I find more riches, light, love and strength in receiving my Saviour in the holy Sacrament of the Altar, than I should receive from the visits of all the Angels, and all the Saints of paradise. With all this it often seems to me that I am like a beast of burden, I am so overwhelmed beneath the load of my miseries; but when my Saviour is in me, He is all in all to me. I frankly confess to you, that it seems to me it would be a great grief to be deprived of the holy communion. If it sometimes happens that my infirmities deprive me of the power of communicating, my soul and my heart, during the rest of the day, are altogether languishing, and deprived of their true life. This, my good Father, is all that I can tell you: that is why I place my whole riches in the hands of you three.

It is a long time since I have written to the dear Father Anginot. I have not left off thinking of him before God. I beseech you to assure him of it. I thought that you might communicate to him what I have told you of the dispositions of my soul. I am always idle about writing, as about all the rest of my duties.

Pray, if you please, for your daughter, my very dear Father.

LETTER LXIII.

To the same Mother Jane of the Angels.

THAT WE ARE NEVER HAPPY BUT WHEN WE MAKE GOD ALONE OUR DELIGHT AND REST; THAT FEW PERSONS ARE IN THIS STATE OF PERFECTION, AND HOW IT MAY BE ATTAINED TO.

February 10, 1659.

It is good for you, my dear daughter, to have to experience annoying and humiliating occurrences, and to feel the weight of your own wretchedness. All this tends to take away from you the support your soul might otherwise find out of God. We shall never be happy until our Lord shall have granted us the grace so to esteem the interior treasures we possess by faith, as that all else is nothing to us compared with them. But this disposition of mind is very superficial in most souls, even of those who believe themselves to be devout. For though it be true they have forsaken evil, they still seek support and gratification out of God, in things human and natural. We must raise ourselves a step higher, and go forward to that which is divine, allowing our hearts to expand and to rest only in God. Where the soul finds her full expansion, there it is also she finds her rest, and not in that merely, which she most prizes. All Christians esteem God above all things; but all have not fervour enough to give their souls free scope in God alone. They con-

tent themselves with not provoking Him; but they will not deprive themselves of the gratification they have in the accomplishment of their own will and desires, which therefore imprison and fetter the heart. This is why they never bring themselves to expand in God; to have no ardour but in seeking God, no rest but in finding Him, no pleasure but that of possessing Him, or of executing His commands, and of accomplishing His designs.

The world is full of people who desire God with a vague and general will. We should bring ourselves to do nothing specially but with the end of pleasing God, finding our joy in the good pleasure of God, and detaching ourselves from all else. If we make this our task and our employment for the interior life, we shall soon see and feel our advance. Most people complain that nothing takes place within their interior. This proceeds from their not having seriously undertaken to advance in God. They are content to ramble along, following the ordinary course of things, provided they avoid great evils. It is true that it costs us something to attain to this point of perfection. The soul must be kept for a long time in a subjection which is but little agreeable to nature. We must not be discouraged by the difficulties of so high an enterprise. It requires a courage and constancy. These are often wanting, and then, from natural cowardice, people weary of the trouble, fall back upon themselves, and begin again to give their hearts to the joys they were accustomed to seek, in its common-place attachments.

Whosoever wills to follow out this generous aim of not allowing his heart to expand and rest except in God, must observe all his actions, examine all his intentions, watch over his interior, banish trouble and disquietude from it, and maintain the presence of God there. By these means he will establish a spirit of peace in his soul, and form to himself there a taste for God, which must be carefully preserved. He must to this end break with all that is not God, sustaining himself by the divine help in faith and in hope, obstinately refusing to receive any voluntary joy into his heart except from things which God either prescribes or permits to him. The following out this line of conduct would make a man enter into a new order of things, in which the soul would become perfectly spiritual, and would act only from spiritual and supernatural motives. We should soon see the progress of a solid work of grace. We should pass to the most exalted and refined exercises of perfection, to a full and entire resignation, an heroic abandonment of self into the hands of God, an inviolable fidelity, first in fulfilling our duties, and then in following the impulses given us by the Holy Spirit. We should be admitted to a familiarity with God; we should have a constant love of Him, and, finally, we should find in God a sovereign peace, and the perfection of all virtues. Most persons who engage in God's service, have at the outset this grand aim of seeking God, and of not wishing for anything out of God. They often have holy inspirations urging them to it; every day they form fresh plans about it, a thousand grand projects, and no results.

Believe, my dear daughter, that the road of spiritual advancement is continually to reanimate our fervour, to discern the motions of our heart, to subject our mind to grace, to deliver ourselves up absolutely to our Lord, courageously to carry out all that He inspires us to do, and to abandon ourselves to Providence and to obedience. Even though you should see the good effects of grace in some souls, yet hold it for certain that, if they are not in the practice of these things, they will never make much progress. Let us follow after what is most perfect. I beseech our Lord to grant you the grace.

In Him I am, &c.

LETTER LXIV.

To the same.

UPON THE MANNER OF INSTRUCTING THE NOVICES, AND OF LEADING THE YOUNG PROFESSED NUNS BY THE WAY OF LOVE.

February 23, 1659.

I must communicate to you a thought I have in my mind, relating to the bringing up of the Novices and of the young professed Nuns, who are in your hands, my dear daughter. You will acquaint the Mother Bignon with it. I consider that the great secret for procuring their spiritual advancement, is to deal with them in the spirit of

love. I do not mean that love, which would flatter their imperfections, and accommodate itself to the inclinations of nature. Young Sisters are only too subject to such loves. I mean, on the contrary, the love which proceeds from grace, and which, without softness or cowardice, really procures the good and salvation of souls; which permits of no vicious weakness, or instincts of self-love, nor of anything contrary to the perfect charity we should have for God. This love is as sweet and as tender as any human love could be; but it is pure, and desires only what is generous and divine. Its sweetness consists in that it endures weaknesses, bides its time, and by its skill deceives souls for their good, taking from them what they love inordinately, and making them do what they dread, but what is nevertheless profitable for them. It caresses them, it always satisfies them, and never shocks them, never making them go through anything, but what they really wish for and like. But when it has gained the will, it uses it freely, and mortifies nature, without the will daring or being able to complain of it. This love has a wonderful prudence, which it could only receive from God, who is equally good and wise. Its first care is to see that a good will be firmly established in the soul. Then it raises the heart up, making itself master of it. Then it makes it submit to whatever it thinks fit, never permitting it anything low, and yet taking care never to wound it. It so tempers its conduct, that the heart always remains satisfied, because it is won, and won by the attractions of grace, and the charms of the love of God. It is souls only that this love holds dear, and it

makes them know the sincerity of its affection. It permits to them all that may be permitted, without prejudice to grace. But, though it condescends sometimes, it does so, without ever relaxing, in anything, from the pure and perfect good.

This love kills its rival, which is self-love. It discovers its deceits, puts a stop to its violence, and pursues it everywhere, to destroy its sway and overthrow its schemes. Whilst thus attacking the enemy, it even treats the soul with rigour, but always within the limits fixed by the Divine light, which never inclines it to what might wound the heart. When a good disposition has once taken possession of a heart, it must never be choked by a dispiriting manner, but must be made to increase, must be purified and perfected, and so we attain a good success in all things. But to do this, persons who rule should have recourse to God, to be illuminated by His light. As for souls who cannot be brought to this good disposition, they must be dealt with in a different way; one must make them feel what is bitter, yet without showing them anything which might prejudice love, or the sweetness that is its companion.

This love having made itself master of the soul, strikes sometimes somewhat severely, and gives to nature vigorous blows, disturbing her even a little sometimes. But it does not let disquiet reign, because it is its office to preserve the peace and strength of the soul. God pursues this same order in His conduct. If He strikes on one side, if He lays desolate and chastises, upon the other He upholds. Contrariwise, it is the characteristic

of the evil spirit to make the soul desolate, without giving any consolation.

Those who rule by another way than that of love, pretty often imitate in this the conduct of the devil. But true love cannot suffer its children to be overwhelmed by labour, nor that they be in trouble, or in danger of being lost. It treats them as Assuerus treated Esther, when he saw her confused by the splendour of his majesty. He descended from his throne to support and to caress her, for fear she should fall into a swoon. Thus generous love knows not what it is to abandon a soul. If it appears to do so, it is not acting blindly, but with the view of some good resulting from its conduct. It does nothing without light, and all that it does is for the good of the soul. Try, my dear daughter, thus to possess the hearts of others, so as to lead them to love the things of God. When you once have their hearts, you will do what you like with them; and if you do not make use of your power to draw them completely out of themselves; if you leave in them the least fibre of self-love, or of their natural low aims, you will do them a great wrong. All there should be great and sublime, all should be animated by God. They should do nothing from human motives, nor from those low sympathies and instincts which proceed from nature. All must be done with a view to Jesus Christ, and to the carrying out of His doctrine. Then purity, gentleness, and peace will be seen reigning there, for they never fail to be found where the Spirit of Jesus Christ holds sway. Souls that wish to be

altogether His, can be so by no other road than that of this love.

In Him, I am, &c.

LETTER LXV

To the same.

UPON THE SAME SUBJECT.

March 17, 1659.

I have already written fully about the things which are to remain secret between you and me, my dear daughter; I will speak to you to-day of what relates to the good of your Sisters. You render a great service to our Lord in the cultivation of the souls under your care, and especially in that of the young professed Nuns and Novices, whom you must inspire with great thoughts about virtue, and with great courage in embracing the practice of it. To bring to effect these grand ideas, they must not be content with mediocrity, but must strain after what is most perfect. No movement of life must they leave in their interior but what moves for God. They must banish all the rest they have in creatures, and in no way lean upon them. They must abandon themselves entirely to God, hoping for all kinds of help from Him, notwithstanding their miseries and weakness, feeling certain that if they sincerely seek God, He can give the soul not only wherewith to go on, but

also enough to content her fully. Cut off then, by degrees, their little human supports. Stablish them in a generous resolution of giving themselves up thoroughly to the service of God, of correcting their faults, and of repressing their natural impetuosity. Do not suffer any too ardent desire in them for whatsoever it may be, unless for their advancement in perfection. Get them thoroughly convinced that the more they forsake themselves, the more they will advance onward, stripping themselves, for the love of God, of all their rights and petty interests; bearing no resentment in their heart, on account of any annoyances they may have received from them; never in any way reflecting upon what relates to their happiness, and expecting no return of friendship from any one. Get them to have no other care but that of seeking God, of finding and conversing with Him. But give them to understand that virtue, and the peace which accompanies virtue, are not acquired in a day. We must pass through days of sadness, sustain and fight rude combats; bear many contradictions, wearinesses, dulness of mind, depressions, languors, aridities in prayer; often experience the vivacity of our passions, and a thousand other weaknesses contrary to virtue.

It is in suffering all this humbly and generously that we acquire the most perfect well-being. We must never be discouraged. We must not, from the experience of our wretchedness, cease at all to hope with confidence in God, nor slack in our design of straining after and attaining to what is most perfect. For in the end God gives all things, provided we have manfully combatted evil, and

have been faithful in casting ourselves into His arms, expecting all things from Him. We must take nothing into account but this, that the soul death finds busy at her work is happy, even though in her own opinion, she have gained little. If only she remains ever in expectation of the divine aid, in her endeavours to do well, without any flattering of self; oh! how great will be her joy and her reward. Let not the Novices imagine that they will suffer for a long time, that their life will be long, and that they will perhaps never have satisfaction in the Religious life. Let them not fancy that those who live in freedom in the world are happy. These are the chimeras which the devil often puts into their minds, to disgust them with their vocation. But let them be brave, and hold fast the design of working out their perfection, abandoning themselves entirely to obedience and mortification.

When you have gained their consent to go to God at any price, do not spare them, and work hard with them to root out of their heart their own will and their self-love. They will one day bless the hand which has helped them to kill nature in themselves.

I beg our Lord to make such a selection of the souls He places in your house, that all may be of the temper necessary for the designs of His grace.

LETTER LXVI.

To the same.

PORTRAIT OF A SOUL COMPLETELY POSSESSED BY GOD AND BY THE LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST.

June 5, 1659.

It is long, my dear daughter, since we have had news of you. I beseech you to keep yourself always in our Lord, giving place to nothing of your own but for the sake of God. For I am persuaded that perfect well-being consists in having our Lord alone for the end and motive of all our aims. There are souls that have God in view, but they do not give up other pretentions. They pour themselves out upon other objects, much to their hurt. The soul that is really faithful regards God alone, and rests in nothing but for God's sake. She keeps her eyes and her heart so fixed upon God, that He is sole interior Master, disposing of her completely, without any resistance to His designs. He might well be Master by absolute authority; He might subject all to Himself by force; but the sweet disposition of grace requires that He do all things in the soul through herself; that she follow of her own free will the impulse He inspires her with, and submit herself voluntarily to Him in all things. God does this by winning the soul, convincing the mind, and attracting the heart. The soul being affected and

convinced, does what she can to please the Lord, and the slightest obstacle she offers, whether by a free consent, or by a simple contrary inclination, is a resistance to the perfect dominion of God. It should be our study, then, so to bend our desires, our will, and our dispositions, that the road may be smoothed for God, and that His grace may obtain all that it will from us. This requires a long exercise, an uninterrupted practice. When once our Lord has brought a soul into His way, she should never stop short nor rest but in Him. She should care for Him only. Earthly objects present themselves; and when the heart sees no harm in them, it commonly stops short and rests in them; it relishes the enjoyment of them; but the faithful soul passes on, and proceeds on her way towards God, flying from all the frivolities and the mean gratifications of nature, and choosing to taste no sweetness out of God.

The way of sufferings is most useful, because it prepares the soul to practice this perfection; for troubles and crosses separate her from creatures, and oblige her to have recourse to God to take her rest in Him. Thus she accustoms herself to keep united to God; she dwells in the bosom of God, and converses with Him, either by humble resignation and submission, or only by simple attention. God raises her, when it pleases Him, to His intimate familiarity. She never loses sight of Him; she is intent only upon Him, rejoices but in Him, feeding upon Him only, living only through Him, sharing in His Spirit, so as to work in His service, and in the execution of His will. To this she excites others, toiling with all her

strength for the salvation of every one. She is like a thirsty person, who thinks only of quenching her thirst; the thirst that burns her is that of embracing her divine Spouse, or of working in His service, advancing His glory and winning souls for Him. She thinks of that only, because that is her profession, and she so arranges as to have nothing else in the world to do. A sort of battle takes place between the soul and God. The soul, from the pure desire of pleasing God, dies to herself, and detaches herself from all things, likes to suffer, and always strains after what is best, without giving way to the lesser good. God, upon His side, delights in keeping her in His sweet embraces, and in caressing her. The more He makes her experience sweetness and consolations, the more she detaches herself from them by self-renunciation, because she desires Him only and not His favours. Nothing has any charm for her but her divine Spouse. Whatever good it may please Him to do to her, she takes pleasure only in thinking of Him, in desiring and in possessing Him. The fidelity of pure love which she shows Him, obliges Him to disclose His beauty more and more to her, to win her to Himself by fresh attractions, to crown her with His gifts, to delight her with His caresses, to inflame her with His fires, to flood her with the torrents of His delights. The soul loses herself in all this, and when she returns to herself and is conscious again, she flies to her Lord's service, and what she desires above all is to engrave His holy Passion in all hearts, and to establish His love in them. For herself she seeks only abasement and humiliation. She makes a nest

for herself of contempt, of scorn, of affronts, abandonment and persecution. She hides herself there and rests in it as though her whole heart were centred there, united to Jesus Christ crucified, humiliated, outraged, despised, persecuted, who penetrates her and fills herself with Himself, even to making the body feel His presence and His virtue.

In all the attacks made upon her, God shelters her, He makes her see His wisdom, and taste His goodness in all His creatures, and makes them all serve for her recreation and advancement; He shows her His plans in the order of grace; how He has given His Son and His Holy Spirit, and all His treasures; how He wishes to unite Himself with men, filling them with His truths and His love, as the Apostles were filled with them on the day of Pentecost. They had them in such fulness, that they could not contain it. They were as though forced to communicate to others the abundance of the treasures with which they overflowed; it was their joy to do good to men, and in that to act according to the pleasure of God, and the design of His love. It was love they had received, which is a fire vehement and active for raising and sanctifying souls, and at the same time sweet and caressing, to console them. The Saints, touched by this spirit, are raised high above all things; but they are gentle, charitable, seeking to do good to every one, because what prompts and animates them is love, bringing with it power, riches, and delights. It is powerful; nothing astonishes it; the whole divinity is contained in it; illuminations, truths and graces are in its store. It is

delightful, because it is goodness itself, which makes itself familiar, and gives itself wholly, and makes itself felt by the heart, fully satisfying it, and intoxicating it by its abundance; ravishing and bearing it away by its strength, penetrating it by its subtility; charming and possessing it by its gentleness, and showing it that true good is only to be found in it. The soul tastes all this with a certainty and sublimity of faith, which inclines her to unite herself to God, to obey Him, and to submit herself in all things to His will. She sees her happiness begun, since her God is so plainly manifested to her; the greatness of the good she possesses is so present to her, and she so clearly knows the malice and vanity of the world. She sees that it is in this that life consists; that all other good is but poverty, grief, languor, misery, and death. Naught can any longer dazzle or content her; and like a sheep tied to its shepherd, she never leaves Jesus Christ, knowing that without Him she may lose herself at any moment. She esteems nothing but Him, and all that the world prizes, she looks upon as wind and smoke. She arranges to have nothing else to do but to rejoice in the Lord, and to serve Him to the full extent of her power.

My dear daughter, keep yourself tied to this Sovereign Good by an inviolable love and fidelity; and if you find yourself weak, seek in Him your strength with a humble submission and a firm and loving confidence, remaining only in Him, reposing in Him alone; and since He died for you, having no life but for Him.

Please write to the Mother de Relay, and render

to her all kinds of charitable duties. Do the like to all the souls you can help, and persuade each one to forsake herself by true self-renunciation, and to approach to our Lord by prayer, to obtain His light and His guidance, because without it the maxims of error and of self-love overcome the mind and deceive the soul. Believe that I am in our Lord, &c.

LETTER LXVII.

To the same.

THAT GOD PREPARES SOULS BY SUFFERINGS FOR WORKING PERFECTLY IN THEM.

July 29, 1659.

I beg you, my dear daughter, to keep up your heart, amidst all the ills and troubles, that our Lord permits should befall you. I think His design is to raise you by this means above the things which generally encumber the mind, and keep souls earth-bound, so that they are much diverted from the work of their perfection, and can only half apply themselves to it. When the soul has passed through troubles with resignation, a habit of considering God only forms itself in her, and this gives her a great elevation of heart, which, having become habitual, puts her in possession of a very great good. For this cause I advise you to watch carefully over your heart, and

to fix it upon God, not suffering it to seek its enjoyment nor its rest out of God, either in any created thing or in yourself. For this end we must do violence to ourselves, because we have an original bent, which always sways us towards ourselves, by the pursuit of what may gratify nature. Thus grace should work upon us, as a workman works upon a block of marble or wood, taking away its first form, and giving to it that which he has conceived in his imagination. Now this cannot be done without pain, and the pain proceeds from the nobility of the work, and the coarseness of the material. If the soul is not very docile and submissive to the hand of the workman who works upon her, her resistance will prevent the good she might have done to her. There are two things then which are necessary; the first is to give ourselves up entirely to the hand of God, not resisting Him in any way by our own ways, or our own pursuits; the second, is not to take part by inclination, and much less by action, in any designs but those of God, obeying simply the divine Workman who works in us, and letting ourselves be led so completely by His grace, as to find no rest but in that; so that grace alone may work in and rule us. We should have no taste but for what proceeds from it, and not be even able to endure what proceeds from any other principle. For grace is so good, that it applies itself to perfect all that is in man; there is nothing in the whole of human life which cannot, and which ought not, to be enhanced and formed by grace, God despising nothing of what He has made in His creature, but taking pleasure in rectifying and making it

perfect in all its parts. For this cause these souls, that wish to belong altogether to God, should be assured that all things can be done in them by the principle of grace; and then, without making any indiscreet effort, they will give place to grace in all things.

This is a most sublime and most pure way, and our Lord prepares us for this eminent perfection by sufferings. The harder they are to bear, the more they subdue the rebellion of nature, and the opposition she naturally has to this happy subjection, in which her reparation and her good are to be found. Be then like a piece of canvass on a frame, laid before the Holy Spirit, who, with the intention of producing an excellent piece of workmanship, pierces you here and there with pain, as though with a needle, to insert the silk and the colours. Each time He pierces the material upon which He works, and at every stitch, He fastens a pearl or something precious, to embellish and to adorn His embroidery. The canvass must therefore be well stretched, very firm on the frame. It has nothing to do but receive the touches of the hand which works out this perfection, not wearying, nor becoming at all impatient, of the length of the work, which lasts so much the longer as the work is to be more delicate and of greater price. Bear the operations of God in yourself, my dear daughter. They are most exquisite in works of this kind; but they are often also very hidden and unusual, the more so as they bear less proportion with human wisdom and with our ordinary conduct. Do not tire; for it sometimes happens that when we think we have got to the end, then it is that

the divine Workman begins all over again, and reduces His work to such simplicity, that the more simple His workmanship is, and without visible artifice, the more it is divine. The wonder is that God, in the reparation of nature, only brings it back to the first design He had in forming it. But it is so disfigured by the strange fashions taken from the world and self-love, that, to restore it to its primitive beauty, it must be almost altogether recast, and it is on this account that it costs us so much to make ourselves good.

First, the soul makes a rough sketch of the work; then our Lord, seeing she can do nothing that is worth anything, and considering her good will, makes her leave off, and sets Himself to fashion her. But as He is a great Master, who has thoughts infinitely raised above ours, He surprises the creature by His way of acting, and He takes her out of her natural habits, to such a degree that she sometimes feels quite giddy, with astonishment. But, as God is a good Father, He takes care to strengthen and to comfort her. Nevertheless, He makes her pass by ways that are incomprehensible, and the higher they are, so much the less does she understand them. She sees herself enriched by heavenly treasures, and has hardly any fear of losing them; for, attributing the whole to God, she dwells securely under His protection; and, ravished by the good He does her, she makes of herself a victim, given altogether to His praise and service, without any consideration of herself. If all the world were to come to revere her and to sound her panegyric, she could take no part in the respect paid to her, nor in the praises rendered

her. On the other hand, when despised and dishonoured, she feels no pain from it. She sees God only in all things, and cares for Him alone. Communicate this to the Mother Superior; for what I say to you is also for her. May all your Sisters have great diligence in corresponding with grace.

I am, &c.

LETTER LXVIII.

To the same.

A GOOD EXERCISE FOR ADVANCING IN THE UNION WITH OUR LORD.

October 27, 1659.

Since we cannot see each other, my dear daughter, I must tell you by letter what I have deeply at heart for the good of the souls that are in your hands, and of those other Sisters, to whom you can communicate your thoughts. Let me say, then, that the reason of our slight advance in union with our Lord, is that our ideas are low, and our aims for His service but very paltry. We ought to have grand ideas and sublime designs; but we are not capable of them, because our souls are not enough at liberty, nor strong enough to lead an interior life. They have not this strength and freedom, because we are weakened by our attachment to things without, which withdraw

us from our interior life, carrying away a part of our strength, and rendering us dependent upon those objects on which we pour out our affections. We cannot be sincerely united to God, unless the soul be profoundly recollected and occupied within herself. This recollection and occupation are founded upon the consideration of the things of faith; of death, of the judgments of God, of the vanity of this life, of what God does for us, and of the love of Jesus Christ towards us. We draw from these considerations reflections to apply to our own interior. In order to do it the better, we separate ourselves from outward things, and collect ourself within. We seek solitude; we love silence; we fly inquisitiveness, and all that might waste the mind.

Besides this, all possible diligence is to be given to make our entry into the inner exercises of virtue, as, for instance, to resign ourselves into the hands of God in all that befalls us; to submit ourselves to Him; to detach our heart from all things; to have the Life and Passion of our Lord ever before our mind; to avoid all frivolities and all vain conversations which would take from us the spirit of compunction and of fervour. All this must be done gently and with a holy cheerfulness of heart. By these interior dispositions, which we seek for in prayer, which we ask in communion, and for which we call ourselves to account in the examinations of conscience, we cultivate our interior just as the earth is cultivated, by uprooting all our vicious principles, and mortifying all the productions of corrupted nature, its own humour, its own judgment, its own will. We give ourselves up to obe-

dience, to be exercised in things contrary to our natural inclination, to be introduced to the practice of true virtue, and directed in its ways. Happy the souls that find persons, who do them this charity of exercising them and mortifying them until the end.

When this is wanting, a certain plaster of natural repose covers the soul, which causes the exterior to appear reasonably enough composed to the world's liking; but the interior is naked, and bare of true grace, which always follows and accompanies virtue, as virtue follows closely the death of our natural instincts, to tread after her. This plaster covers up the liveliness of our passions. But if anything is done against our honour, our interests, and our inclinations, we resent it keenly, and break forth into complaints and murmurings; we unburden our heart, and lose time in useless talking, to satisfy our passion. The honest soul, that has a sincere desire of serving God, soon frees herself from all this entanglement, to give herself up entirely to her truly holy and spiritual enterprise, which is preferable to all things. She applies herself to it without intermission, and never ceases in her pursuit, until she has, formed in her, an interior habit of rest in thoughts of God, and in those actions upon which spiritual advancement depends. Then we find ourselves so much at ease with regard to God and divine things, that we care no longer for all the rest; and all creatures, out of God, seem like nothing.

Never weary, then, my dear daughter, of striving to incline the souls in your hands to this occupation, of forming in them the image of Jesus

Christ, by means of the exercises that I have just pointed out to you. Above all, do not leave them a little net of natural and human attachments for the persons they love, but let them love in the order of grace and of reason only. When once this interior rest has been established in the soul, so that in matters of virtue, they have no longer any bent for this or that particular thing, then the soul acquires new strength, and finds herself raised to a higher level, namely, to that of relishing nothing but God. To this end she studies to die to her most darling inclinations, and her most cherished schemes, only reserving to herself the enjoyment of the will of God. And as she subjects herself entirely to grace, she has such a horror of every kind of evil, that the least imperfection she observes in herself appears monstrous to her, because she is persuaded that in Religion all should be holy. But especially when any fault of scandal or of bad example is committed in Religion, it should be looked upon as a devil, who wants to intrude himself into the house of God; and, though we must always use gentleness and charity, nevertheless scandalous faults must not be looked upon as of little consequence, and the persons who commit them should be humbled. I call faults of bad example, those which are done in public, from obstinacy, or want of charity towards our neighbour. For, in fact, these faults, and others like them, would do inconceivable hurt, if they became so common as to be no longer a matter of astonishment; it would be a great misfortune for women of the world, for they come to Religion, that they may serve God without hin-

drance. And if some Sister think this too severe, she ought to fear that our Lord will not be very favourable to her, and that His countenance, which is the joy of Angels, will one day appear to herself full of severity. Now, the heart will be perfectly satisfied if we lead a strict and fervent life, and we shall have great confidence and consolation at the hour of death. This last passage can only be sweet to the faithful servant of our Lord, who has merited by her purity to become His spouse. She it is who shall dwell in peace and delights; for it is an undoubted truth, that there is no state upon earth, sweeter, more charming, more capable of satiating the heart, than the state of a soul purified by sufferings, persecutions, and adversities. All her troubles terminate in familiar converse with her heavenly Bridegroom, and in a marvellous heartfelt satisfaction in seeing that the will of God is accomplished; that we are in fact wholly in the power of God, made to be what He pleases, and that by His will. This is a paradise of delight: but, to feel it, we must have renounced all other satisfaction but that of belonging altogether to God, whose glory and will are all in all.

LETTER LXIX.

To the same.

THAT, ENTERING THE SERVICE OF GOD, WE MUST FIRST PROPOSE TO OURSELVES PERFECT VICTORY OVER SELF-LOVE.—EASY MEANS OF GAINING IT.

January 13, 1660.

When I consider the cause why so many Religious, who have left all to follow our Lord, are nevertheless so slack and lukewarm in His love, the reason seems to me, my dear daughter, to be that, when entering upon the way of perfection, they do not get hold of the right idea they should have; they do not extricate themselves from the original error common to all men, of keeping the false principle of self-love always in view. We ought to get well hold of this truth, that we are born and brought up with certain returns upon self, and a desire of seeing ourselves comfortable, loved and cherished, esteemed and respected by every one; not seeing that this natural instinct, which is a spurious offshoot of that just and well-ordered love, which each one owes to himself according to the will of God, is to us our death and our loss. For in consequence of this we hold those for our enemies who despise us, thwart us, or oppose us in our vanities and pleasures. The instinct of love ought to make us to preserve our peace, and maintain ourselves in the dispositions necessary for attend-

ing to God and our salvation. This inclination of love has been imprinted upon us by God with our being; but, from error and corruption, we apply it to what pleases and gratifies our vicious self-love, desiring to have all done according to that disordered inclination which is in us.

Virtue and the Religious life come to our assistance, and divine grace, from pure mercy, brings us back from our wanderings, and leads us to the search of the true Good; but our vicious inclination, our bad habits, and the bad examples that we see, incline us still to grovel in those low and earthly good things, in which we have been accustomed to seek our satisfaction.

The soul that follows the light of grace, follows a totally opposite line of conduct. She does all she can to kill this instinct, to free herself from this habit which leads to sin; for both one and the other teach impatience, murmuring, disobedience, keen resentments, vengeance; and the greater number of vices follow in their train. It is true that the fear of God prevents her from committing very great sins; but if we are content with this; if we have not courage to root out our smaller faults, and especially that which is the root of all,—self-love, we lead but a slovenly life, always remaining in our imperfections, and that voluntarily, because we find the gratification of our senses, and a natural rest, in the enjoyment of, or, at least, in the pursuit of, some vain pleasure or false honour.

We must then wage a continual war against self-love, employing for this all our spiritual armour, prayer, and the sacraments, as also the counsel and guidance of wise and experienced persons.

We must unceasingly consider and engrave deeply in our minds, that our real good is to live in humiliation and subjection, in the mortification of our senses, and privation of things that would be to us a natural rest. We must walk in the way of grace, where gentleness, goodness, charity, brotherly union, devotion, obedience, and strength to repress the disorderly impulses of the appetite, are to be met with. It now remains to be seen how this should be done gently and pleasantly, so that we may do it with all our heart, and persevere in it with edification. We must cast our eyes upon Jesus Christ, who has been given us for an example, and whom all the predestinate should resemble. When we see that He, who is the Son of God, the Chief and the King of all men, was led by His divine wisdom, for the glory of His Father and our salvation, to choose a manner of life by which He fought until death against self-love, living in abjection, poverty, and sufferings, that He espoused a low estate among men, contempt, scorn, and contradictions, in order to give us courage; and that He has acquired a treasure and a fund of graces by dying for us; these thoughts and considerations will excite us to love Him, and to take for love of Him what He took for love of us; to wear His livery, since He is our spouse. Then aided by grace, and armed against ourselves and our perverse instincts, we shall accustom ourselves to do what Jesus Christ did, to suffer what He suffered. We shall embrace the same humiliating and painful conditions which He underwent, we shall exercise ourselves in combating in ourselves all that opposes His Spirit and

His guidance, and we shall look for, as the fruit of our pains, that true joy and peace, and the holy raptures, which rejoice the souls that gain a complete victory over themselves. True it is that, at first, we shall find some little trouble in these combats with our own will and our unmortified inclinations; but, eventually, in proportion to our courage and the fidelity manifested to our Lord in this holy war, the difficulties will pass away, and what we do and suffer no longer costs anything. Jesus Christ discovers to the souls of His spouses the beauty of His countenance, He honours them with His familiarity; He manifests His secrets to them; He makes them taste the delights of His grace. The Holy Spirit gives them His consolation; the Eternal Father shows them the perfection of His Word, and the admirable connection of love which He has with Him.

This blessing is grounded upon the promise of our Lord, who has expressly said: "*He who hears My word and keeps it, I will love Him, and My Father will love Him, and we will come to Him and make our abode with him.*" Now, this abiding must not be only understood of the communication of His grace, but further of His familiar conversation, of the sweetness of His speech, of His supernatural lights, and of His treasures of wisdom and knowledge. These treasures are possessed by generous souls who conquer their self-love; but cowards who have not even courage to attack it, nor to follow the example of Jesus Christ, remaining in their wretchedness, in darkness, and in the meanness of self-love, in their own griefs and troubles, having no other gratifications than those

of the senses and of nature; these give way to impatience, break forth into murmurings, combat the spirit of grace, have their conscience full of troubles, and are never satisfied. This, my dear daughter, is what I have to say to you for the present. I beg you to imprint this doctrine very deeply in the minds of the young souls whom you guide, that they may early enter into the truth of God, upon which the Saints feed. Then they may escape that falsehood upon which sinners and the imperfect live in ignorance of their true good, of the peace, the joy, and the love, whose pure delights make the soul experience even in this life a foretaste of eternal happiness. I beg you to send this letter to the Mother Buignon.

LETTER LXX.

To the same.

THAT A SURE WAY OF ATTAINING TO THE HIGHEST PERFECTION, IS TO TAKE OUR REST AND OUR SATISFACTION IN GOD ONLY.

January 22, 1660.

I imagine, my dear daughter, that your good Sisters, hearing what is said and written to them regarding the perfection of the Religious life, and conceiving great desires of attaining to it, would like to be taught distinctly how to reach this end. I purpose doing this to-day, by communicating to

you a thought which has come into my mind on this point.

I think that those whose only wish is to go to God, and to advance in the interior life, should make it a special study never to seek their rest or satisfaction apart from God and His holy will, steadfastly keeping up this practice, until they come to enjoy God only, and to find no peace nor satisfaction but in Him. To this end we must watch over all our conduct, and when we perceive that we are taking pleasure in earthly things, we must promptly retreat from them, and replace ourselves in God, that is to say, in the actions that relate to His service, or to the exercise of virtues. A soul that is determined to give herself all to God without reserve, and that has such an esteem and love of Him as to prefer God to all else, easily withdraws herself from all that does not tend to Him, and renounces without pain these natural and imperfect gratifications, which are to be found in creatures. I meet, for example, an agreeable person; I take pleasure in his conversation, and I feel my heart drawn to his. I ought to consider, without deceiving myself, whether this drawing leads me to God and helps me to love Him; or, on the contrary, takes me from God and engages me too much. If I observe that it produces this latter effect, I shall immediately mortify the pleasure I feel, not letting myself be beguiled by a maxim of self-love, authorised by some philosophers, that we have a natural right to take pleasure in what is neither bad, nor forbidden by God; and that to aim at uprooting natural feelings, provided we do no harm with them, is an excess of

melancholy or of severity. For myself, I say that those, who hold this language and maintain this practice, will never attain to the perfection of divine love, which can only take root in the soul that is detached from all things. The book of the Imitation of Jesus Christ says thus: "*If thou knewest how to detach thyself altogether from creatures, Jesus would take pleasure in abiding with thee.*"

Perfect love, which is a delicious flame, can only be relished by the souls that no longer enjoy anything but God. Thus those who make so much difficulty in weaning themselves from the things of earth, under pretext that there is no harm in them, will always remain in a low stage of virtue, dry and without unction in their spirituality. We see some who say that there are different ways of attaining to perfection, and that, as for them, they are not led by the way of spiritual enjoyments. I should like to say to them: "*Your road is perhaps that of slothfulness, from whence proceeds also your dryness.*" They think they walk in pure intelligence by fine reasonings, and that spiritual sweetness and sensible graces are only for the weak. When dryness is found in the supernatural way of grace, it is in souls that have greatly enjoyed God. After great communications He tries them thus: but, in general, dryness comes from the flame of holy love not being lighted in the heart. And why have they not this flame there? because they have not made a generous effort to detach themselves from certain things, in which they take pleasure. The fervent soul is only affected by the pleasure, which comes from

God, from what she does for His holy service. In these alone she finds her rest, and this, as it were, obliges God to rest reciprocally in her, and to crown her with His sweetness. Why does He not take His rest in those who boast so much of the solidity of their dry way? Why does He not make them feel the blessings of His sweetness? It is because they delight in trifles: their life is filled with a thousand frivolities: they feed their souls upon a quantity of their little trivial schemes.

Let them examine their joys, their little fits of melancholy, their desires, their fears; let them look well to the motives that induce them to act: have they placed their whole desire and their rest in God? Why have they not the fervour of such and such persons? They will say God leads these persons by one road, and themselves by another. Not at all: but it is that they lead themselves to their little gratifications, ever languishing in their weakness. And why do they remain in this weariness of spirit, with so little feeling of God? For want of making an effort. And what effort? the effort of conquering self and of dragging themselves out of the mire in which they are sunk; that is to say, out of natural satisfactions, of puerile fears, of vain hopes, and of the rest they find in following their own humour and inclinations. That is their way, if they take heed well to it, and their whole misfortune is that they make no persevering effort to come out of themselves. "*In so far as you do violence to yourself to come out of yourself*," says the book of the Imitation of Jesus Christ, "*so far will you make progress in entering into God.*" Thus, my dear daughter, I

come back again to say that the practice of honest souls is to fight against themselves unceasingly, in the matter of this false rest and sweetness, which we naturally find, in satisfying our own humour and will. To persevere in this practice, we must get help by prayer and obedience, and letting ourselves be led like children. May our Lord lead you to this by His holy illuminations.

In Him I am, &c.

LETTER LXXI.

To the same.

THAT THE GREAT COMMUNICATIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ARE FOR THE POOR IN SPIRIT.—OF THE WOUND OF HOLY LOVE.

June 2, 1662.

Since our Lord gives me a convenient opportunity to write to you, my dear daughter, I will use it to satisfy the desires of my heart, in speaking of the effects of grace. What subject more appropriate could I choose for these holy days of Pentecost, which bring us the riches of God in the gift of His Holy Spirit, "*which He has poured out upon us abundantly*," as says the apostle. I really believe, nevertheless, that this abundance is only felt by His blessed poor, who have stripped themselves of all, and who have renounced those pleasures and exterior consolations,

which are to be received from created things. It is to these that the treasures of grace are laid open, those riches of light, and that fulness of understanding of which S. Paul speaks; that peace, that unction, and that sweetness of divine love. I believe also that our Lord bestows presents out of His heavenly treasures upon those other poor, who have not only stripped themselves for love of Him of earthly possessions and temporal advantages, but who, having delivered themselves up to Him to be treated by Him as He wills, having offered themselves to endure for His sake the very hardest privations, have been, by the order of His providence, made to endure very painful states, of which it has pleased Him I should have some experience.

I assure you, my dear daughter, that I have been made to suffer such things, that I never thought to recover myself, or to see again anything else than ills and poverty. Nevertheless, God's goodness has changed this winter into fine weather, and this dearth into abundance, in such a way indeed that the miseries past often come back to my mind with pleasure, and these days of darkness and of trouble, which have made me suffer so much, are now to me a fund of gratitude and of blessings, of consolation and of joy. The state I now enjoy is nevertheless sometimes mingled with some tastes of a poverty, humiliating and surprising enough; but they do not last long, and they serve to make me better discern the treasures that I possess in my dearth. I see myself poor and rich at the same time, and I remember those words of S. Paul: "*That ye be filled*

with all the fulness of God." And what is this fulness? The Apostle describes it a little before; he says, "*That you, with all the Saints, may comprehend the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth of the mystery of Jesus Christ, dwelling by faith in our hearts;*" words marking out all the dimensions of that grace which our Lord makes the soul experience, when she is perfectly submissive to Him, and enters into possession of this fulness of His gifts. When it pleases Him to make her feel this abundance in all its dimensions, then, indeed, having nothing, she is rich, and feels herself so filled that her heart is fully satisfied.

I wrote to you a few days since from the same place where I now am, and I determined to do so again to-day, to testify to you the satisfaction which our Lord gives me to feel, by the possession and enjoyment of a good that has no name, that cannot be expressed. This makes me say that it must necessarily be God, because, on one hand, it satisfies and fills the heart, and, on the other hand, the mind cannot express it nor make it known. We see that these spirits that God has created to tend to Him as to their end, have different occupations in their relations towards Him. The Angels are in a state of joy, because they possess God, they love Him, and they praise Him. The devils are in a state of rage and despair, because they see themselves incapable of possessing so great a good, of which they still have the knowledge. Men who know it by faith are happy in straining towards Him, and more happy when, by an experimental and sensible knowledge, they

are touched by His love, and most happy when this love goes so far as to imprint a wound on the heart, which makes them sigh day and night after Him.

May you, my dear daughter, have this good fortune. I desire that a noble and glorious wound may inflame your heart, making you to cast your eyes unceasingly upon the object of your love, and to tend continually to Him. I have desired it also for myself, and I know not whether to hope or not, that the rest of my strength will be henceforth employed in furnishing life to keep up such a sweet and happy sickness. I have already written you something about it; but as you have not answered my last letters, I will say no more about it now.

LETTER LXXII.

To the same.

HE EXHORTS THE RELIGIOUS OF LOUDUN TO PROFIT BY THE EXTRAORDINARY THINGS, WHICH TOOK PLACE BEFORE THEIR EYES, DURING THEIR POSSESSION.

Chelivettes, July 21, 1662.

I have written to you several times since I have been here, my dear daughter; the convenience I have for this causes me to do so more freely. I have not this convenience in town, for reasons I have before told you. I return to town to-day for some

days, but before starting I wish to tell you something for the good of your Community, which is always very dear to me, and which is also, I believe, most dear to our Lord. I should like that, as the devils have formerly exercised their rage in your house, so our Lord should now work there the effects of His grace. What often prevents Him from doing it liberally is, that we fail to prepare ourselves, and do not, on our part, contribute the requisite care and diligence. I fear that I may say what I have already often said to you; for, when I think of the treasures of grace, certain ideas come before me, which being founded upon a truth always the same, always present also the same objects to the mind. And then, they are things of such weight, that I see nothing better for the advancement of souls; so that, having that alone in my mind, and not even being willing to have any other thing than that which is best of all, I can speak only of that. Many say that I have but one song; I admit it; but it is a song which tells of what is of the greatest importance to us, and of what we forget very easily. For this reason the repetition of it is necessary. God has given you several new subjects who have no idea of your past state, nor of the experiences, which the more ancient Nuns have had, of the malignant operations of the devil, nor do they know what God has done to deliver you from their oppression.

It would be a great misfortune if these things were forgotten by those among you, who have seen and had experience of them; for, although God generally keeps men in the state of pure faith, and by the nakedness of faith perfects them in His

love, still the experiences which enable us to lay our finger upon truths, which the veil of faith ordinarily hides from our eyes, are great blessings, and these souls, that have had these experiences, profit much from them, when they are afterwards bought back to the state of faith. These experiences leave impressions, upon which we may make a firm building. Thus our Lord chose that His apostles, who preached His Gospel, should have seen what they announced to others. And S. John says: "*We announce to you the word of life, which has been from the beginning, whom we have heard, whom we have seen with our own eyes, whom we have beheld, whom we have touched with our hands.*" Thus the old Sisters of your house can say to the young, What we have seen and experienced, and almost touched with our finger, of the misery of those who are condemned and rejected of God, we acquaint you with, and we tell you that it is a deplorable state to be an enemy of God, and to have fallen from the order of His grace. We have seen the disorders and pains of the spirits damned and reprobated by God, and by this we have learnt, and clearly known, how important it is not to separate ourselves from Him, and not to fall into the darkness and irregularities, in which these unhappy devils live. For myself, my dear daughter, I assure you that in the office given me by our Lord, of preaching to country people, to which in a few days I shall have to apply myself more closely than ever, I find nothing better to say to them, than that after so many infirmities, in which I have been plunged so long, God has at length, in some sort, given life back to me, that I

may relate my experiences to those that are in the ordinary state of faith: that, in order to withdraw them from their vices, and lead them back to Him, He wills that I should communicate to them the extraordinary acquaintance I have had with truths, a knowledge of which is necessary for the salvation of souls. For by manifesting to them the frightful state of the devils, as it is known, by a possession; when they have fallen under the power of the Church, and, by her exorcisms, she holds them in bonds, God wills that they may avoid the like misfortune, and may shield themselves from the snares, which these invisible enemies lay for them continually. S. Peter says to Christians: "*My brethren, be sober, and watch, because our enemy the devil goeth about like a roaring lion around you, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith.*" I say the same thing to my good villagers upon the occasions I have to speak to them; and although faith sufficiently convinces us of this truth, it is well, nevertheless, that those who have a more positive knowledge still, should inculcate it upon others, and by so doing awaken those minds, which are apt insensibly to fall asleep in the course of the present life. I have nearly finished this letter, and still I have only written a preamble. I must, nevertheless, conclude by giving your Sisters in particular the same counsel that S. Peter gives to all the faithful. Be on your guard, my dear daughters, for fear the devil fold you in his nets, and make you fall into stupor and abasement of mind, a thing which happens easily enough after great experiences of the other life. For this crafty Enemy, seeing that God,

by His goodness, restores to rest, in the state of faith, souls that have been frightened by an extraordinary acquaintance with the most terrible things, does, on his part, draw them by his artifices into a false confidence, through which they fall into a slumber, and grow slack. I beseech you all not to let this misfortune befall you. To prevent it, recall to your memory all I have formerly written to you, to incite you to live in the presence of God, in fervency of prayer, and in the exercise of interior and exterior mortifications. It is thus that you will take from the Enemy the armour he uses to fight against us, to turn us away from God.

I am, &c.

In another letter he writes to her:

Say from me to your dear Sisters, that our Lord expects them to correspond to grace by great efforts, after the hard trials in which they have been involved. The Mother Agnes and those of her flock well know what God has done amongst you, for the perfection of souls. God does a great many things for us; but afterwards He lets us act for ourselves. It is for us to husband His graces. The gaining of the kingdom of heaven is a matter of freedom, in which grace asks of us correspondence. There is a time, in which God does all by Himself; and what He does is like seed cast upon a field, which must afterwards bring forth its fruit. If this fruit is only indifferent, the seed God has strewn having been abundant, He will have great cause to reproach the earth, which has not produced the fruit hoped for from it. I know r

whether Jesus Christ will reap, at your hands, the harvest He expects, from the graces He has so abundantly poured forth into your souls.

The fruits which He has a right to expect are chiefly the spirit of prayer, which brings with it, silence, peace, and detachment from temporal things; the spirit of charity, which links together the daughters of the same Father, and which gives them a complying temper, and gentleness to bear with one another's faults; the spirit of simplicity, which always accompanies true charity; and finally, a holy hatred of the spirit of the world, of its deceits, its intrigues, and all its ways; thus may the sincerity of grace, and the spirit of religion, reign among you all. This fruit Jesus Christ expects from the good seed He has sown in your field by the many extraordinary aids of His grace, which He has made to triumph among you so illustriously over the powers of hell. I observe, not without astonishment, that He has preserved alive almost all the Nuns of that period. Only three are dead. After all, this world passes; all things hurry away; God alone ever remains. Let us try to bind ourselves to Him.

LETTER LXXIII.

To the same.

THE MAGNIFICENCE AND SWEETNESS OF DIVINE LOVE TOWARDS THE SOULS OF THOSE, WHOM IT HAS POSSESSION OF.

Saint Macaire, September 28, 1663.

Since God has given me the ability to speak to you of Him, my dear daughter, I wish to avail myself of it, from the pure satisfaction I find in using this ability in God and for God. It seems to me a worthy exercise of divine love, to act only from its consideration, and in order to obey the sweet and generous instincts it gives. It inclines the hearts of those it possesses, not only to grand enterprises, noble works and vigorous efforts, so as to make them willing to suffer and to sacrifice themselves on the cross; it has also sweet exercises and diversions of various kinds. Kings have not only their affairs of peace and of war, in which they employ a great number of ministers, but also their pastimes and pleasures; the theatre, the chase, music and carousals, upon which things they lavish a royal expenditure, and which furnish employment to a quantity of officials. So divine love, besides its serious occupations, whether of peace or of war; besides the labours and ordinary occupations, to which it binds the friends and servants of God; has also its pleasures, its plays, its walks,

its entertainments, its concerts, and all such sweetnesses as are a delight to the children of God, and to the spouses of Jesus Christ. Souls which love God purely do not anxiously seek things of this kind; but divine love, being a liberal prince and full of kindness, gives them these things, and the more abundantly, when He sees that, by a true self-renunciation, which is His hostess, they are better prepared to receive Him, having cut off all pleasures not to His liking.

When they have the courage thus to sacrifice to Him what was most dear to them, the Holy Spirit, who is the God of love, discovers to them beauties the most delightful; and makes them enjoy all the sweetness that is capable of charming the heart. He does this, not that they may attach themselves humanly and proudly to them, but that they admire the liberality and magnificence of God, and, by the experience of His goodness, may be animated with a fresh desire of serving Him in a manner worthy of Him; that is to say, with the greatest purity possible. Now, the purity of the love and service of God consists in our loving and serving Him only; in our desiring and seeking Him unceasingly, and in our keeping ourselves in peace, when He deprives us of sensible sweetness. Then love, which has subjected itself to the soul by despoiling her of all, and leaving her only God, gives her a feast so magnificent and so exquisite, that nothing which can be imagined approaches to it. It is to this perfection that our Lord invites us in the Gospel of to-morrow, on which I propose preaching to my good villagers. He there puts before us the great commandment of the law:

"*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.*"

What a law is this we behold, which commands love, and the love of God, and this love in its entire perfection! A law which renders its subjects happy, and the non-keeping of which, as S. Augustine remarks, makes them fall into very great miseries. What the Creator commands by this law, being of all things in the world the sweetest and the most beneficial, we should esteem it our greatest pleasure and our sovereign good. May our Lord give you to understand this obligation. For myself, I make it a great business, and a pleasant diversion, to speak of it, to preach of it, and to write of it. Thus, having no other thing to say to you, I have made it the subject of this letter, to exhort you, all languishing and dying as you are, to the fulfilment of this law of love. Render to God the duty it prescribes until your latest breath, and make it the occupation of your heart, and of all your powers. Unite yourself to God by submission to His law of love. Let the love for which He has created you be the bond which ties you to Him; and if He give you yet some days of life, employ them all in this beautiful exercise of love. Give yourself up to love; abandon yourself to love without reserve, so that you may render to God, by love, all the honour He looks for from you for ever and ever.

In Him, I am, &c.

Remember that to-morrow is the feast of S. Michael. The very name of this great Archangel

should inflame you with the divine love: for Michael means, "who is like to God." What is there to compare with God? Who is it that deserves to be honoured, to be loved, to be served like God? I beseech Him, this God of love, to pour out upon you the sacred unction of His love, that it may so penetrate your heart, and embalm all your powers, as that neither the bitterness of this life, nor the weary languors of your infirmities, nor the pains of your diseases, may be able to lessen in anything either the strength of love, nor the feeling of its sweetness.

LETTER LXXIV.

To the same.

THAT IN THE HOLY COMMUNION WE HAVE ALL THAT CAN FULLY SATISFY THE HEART.

Bordeaux, December 20, 1664.

The peace of God be with you, my dear daughter.

It is always necessary to us, but chiefly when our minds have to encounter contrarieties. It seems to me that God now would have you to pay more attention to the preserving of your peace, since His Providence permits you to meet with so much opposition to the accomplishment of your desires, and takes from you all hope of our journey to Poitou.

Considering all this, I see nothing better than to make use of that saying of S. Francis, which I quoted to you in my last letter. He said to the priests of his Order: "*Since you have the King of heaven present in your hands, how can you employ yourselves in caring for anything else on the earth?*" I say the same to you, my daughter, that we must apply our faith to the Communions we make. Having Jesus Christ present, possessing the Sovereign Lord of the world, who, by His universal word, full of sweetness, speaks to our hearts whatsoever can give us comfort, how is it possible we should feel the poverty of things of earth whatsoever they may be, since of Himself He makes up for the lack of all we might desire? I beseech you, then, so to rest in Him, that His abundance may supply both all your human and natural wants, and even those that are supernatural; for it is His proper office to supply all our wants, not only by His sweetness, but also by His universality, of which the manna given to the Israelites in the desert was the type. Those amongst that people who were the friends of God, as the Book of Wisdom testifies, experienced in the manna, besides its own special taste, the taste of all the meats they had desired to eat of. This favour was not common to all the people. It represents the effect that the holy Eucharist produces in souls cherished by God, making them taste in Jesus Christ all the satisfaction that they could receive from whatsoever creature it might be.

Thus, in the Holy Communion, is fulfilled what our Lord promised in Saint Mark, to those "*who leave for His sake and the Gospel's, their house,*

their brothers, their sisters, their father, their mother, their wife, their children, or their lands; that now, even in this world, they will receive an hundredfold with persecution, and in the world to come eternal life." That is to say, that in reward for perfect renunciation of self, notwithstanding crosses and persecutions, we find in Jesus Christ the satisfaction we might have found in the things of this world, and which we have for love of Him. Nay, by His liberality and magnificence, He gives an hundredfold as much pleasure and gratification as each of the things we renounce could have given. Jesus Christ, who is your food, my dear daughter, when you receive Him with a liberal heart, and after having sacrificed all for love of Him, by giving Himself to you in the blessed Sacrament, restores to you with usury the fruits of all you have sacrificed for Him. You will find, again, in this celestial treasure, all that you have voluntarily lost of good, of joy and of consolation, by the neglect or privation of created things, in which you might have found them. Be well persuaded of this truth: awaken up your faith; be generous, that our Lord may have cause to make you feel this effect of His goodness. Doing thus, you will never be poor; for, possessing the Lord of the universe, in the Sacrament of His love, you will want for nothing.

In Him, I am, &c.

I write to you from my little lodging at the feet of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. May He communicate to you the blessings, which S. Clare enjoyed, when she approached the holy table.

LETTER LXXV.

To the same.

Of interior recollection.

Bordeaux, January 2, 1665.

At the commencement of this year, upon which we enter in the Name of Jesus Christ and depending upon His grace, I wish, as a New Year's Gift to you, my dear daughter, and to all your Community, the abundance of those treasures which are able to enrich the soul; and I feel obliged to tell you, what I never tire of repeating, that I see no more appropriate nor more efficacious means of acquiring these treasures, than the study of recollection, and the removal of things, which dissipate the mind, and draw it outside.

I have now before my eyes the third chapter of the first Epistle of Saint Peter, where, speaking of the modesty of Christian women, and of their chaste conversation, he says, "*that their adornment is not in beautiful hair well plaited, nor in ornaments of gold, nor in carefulness of dress, but in the invisible man hidden in the heart, when he possesses the incorruptible purity of a quiet and modest spirit, which is of great price in the eyes of God.*" By these words the holy Apostle, setting aside the ornaments of luxury and vanity, which often deceive the soul, pictures forth to us the treasures of the man hidden within; peace, quiet-

ness, and modesty; and what other thing is this than the spirit of prayer and recollection? How can we keep ourselves calm and well ordered within, but by putting far from us exterior dissipation, gossipping, vain conversations, intrigues and intercourse with the world? What a misfortune would it be, if this spirit of chattering, curiosity and vanity, were to enter into the family of S. Joseph! If in that house which our Lord has chosen, there to make the victories of His grace shine admirably forth, and which He has put under the protection of S. Joseph, one were to behold worldly manners, compliments, a fashionable style, a love of the parlour, too much communication without, and particular friendships within! It would be so great a misfortune, that I believe the Angels who dwell in that house would forsake it, to go and seek in some other the rest they find amid recollected souls. Our Lord expects something very different from you. I shall never cease to tell you so.

Yes, my dear daughter, so long as I live, I shall importunately tell the daughters of S. Joseph what I believe the Son of God requires from them; what gratitude and what a return of love He has a right to require from them, after having made them feel so many, and such great tokens of His mercy: after having driven away from them the cruel enemies that magic and hell had introduced there; after having filled with benedictions, and taken for His dwelling a place which the devils and their partisans had chosen, to make of it a place of abomination and their retreat. What correspondence for so many graces does not your deliverer

look for from you! I beseech you, therefore, all of you, to renew yourselves in spirit at this commencement of this year, and to begin a new life of fervency and love. Let both the old Mothers who, by such hard trials, have acquired a sincere virtue, and the young whom I have never seen, but for whom I desire the benedictions of heaven, render to our Lord what He looks for from them. Let them all combat generously, since He has brought them by their Religious call into a house of contest, and wishes to give them the reward of those soldiers whom S. Paul arms with all weapons. Let each one be convinced that her contests will only cease with life; that she fights before the eyes of God. Let each remember that He wills that those supernatural goods, of which I so often speak to you, and promise in His name, are to be the reward of victory, and that it is only generous souls that attain to them.

Give my salutations, please, to all your good Mothers and Sisters, and may our Lord shed His graces liberally upon them; that they may be constantly faithful and fervent, and that they may never grow old in slothfulness, to which nature would drag us down.

I am, &c.

LETTER LXXVI.

To the same.

HE TAKES OCCASION OF HER INFIRMITIES TO EXHORT HER TO PERFECTION.

Bordeaux, January 5, 1665.

I pray the Child Jesus to crown you with the graces, which His holy Childhood works in souls duly prepared to receive them. I desire also, my dear daughter, that His divine unction may embalm and perfume you with its heavenly fragrance, so that your soul, being established in peace and penetrated with sweetness, may have its part in the treasures of the Advent of Jesus Christ.

I cannot express to you how lost my spirit sometimes seems to be in the abundance of such sweet and delicious treasures. It is this grace which sustains and strengthens us in such a manner, that, as S. Paul says, "*we do not lose courage, but, although the outer man decays, nevertheless the inner man is renewed day by day.*" Without we are beaten down, and often fainting, because of our infirmities and miseries. Let us, at least, renew ourselves within, and gather strength, so as not to let ourselves be overwhelmed by the weight of corrupt nature, which would drag us down.

These are my wishes for you in your weakness and languor. But Jesus Christ is powerful enough to stablish you firmly in Himself, and to strengthen

you, both in the labours of life and in the conflicts of death. Those conflicts are dreaded, and nothing seems more terrible; but, for myself, my dear daughter, I desire them; I sigh after death as after a great good, regarding it as a suburb to the city of eternal life. What do we here, but languish in a sad banishment, and groan under the weight of the chains of the exterior man, which prevent the interior man from rejoicing in his perfect liberty? For the one is opposed to the other, and that one whom we see, and who occupies us so much without, is not even capable of comprehending the immense treasures that "the invisible man, the hidden man of the heart" can possess. There is an infinite distance, as it were, between this exterior, languishing and moaning in pain, and the interior sighing after God, and uniting itself to Him, when grace enables it to do so. However poor and miserable I may be myself, I venture still to ask of our Lord to be bountiful in His graces to you. I beg Him to turn your heart towards Himself, and to make it so firm, that nothing may prevent you from purely tending to Him in all sincerity. I believe that if we are in this disposition, and if the spirit of truth possess our heart, the unction of His grace will not be slow to pour itself forth and to fill us. Without it, what more miserable creature than we? In proportion as the mind is open to supernatural things, so much the more grace do we receive. This openness manifests itself according as it pleases God, and when the divine life has swallowed up death. Without this grace death always

prevails in us, having come down to us from Adam.

But in whatever state we be, poor or rich, let us be always humble and faithful. Let us be convinced that man is nothing, and that his great obligation and principal law is the duty of obedience to grace. He is bound to correspond with the grace of God. For God prevents him unceasingly, and, drawing him out of his own wretchedness, attracts him to that supreme happiness, of which He has rendered him capable. We second this design and working of God by keeping up a continual intercourse with Jesus Christ, by frequent Communions, thus drawing from the participation of His Body the life of our soul. For He has given us this divine Food to be in us a vital principle, not only of the essentials of life, but also of its perfection; that is to say, of health, of strength, and of that good constitution which renders life sweet and pleasant; without these things life is not perfect nor complete. When we are sickly we are but half alive, and cannot enjoy life's sweetness. Now the delights of the spiritual life consist in the enjoyment of the holy Eucharist, and in the graces given us in proportion to the glory they contain, which is as yet hidden beneath the veil of faith. For the enjoyment of the divine Eucharist is a foretaste of the joys of paradise. Of these joys few have any true notion in the world, on account of the great disproportion which exists between the corruptible meats of the table of men, and the incorruptible of the Table of God; between the pleasures of earth, and those in which the blessed rejoice in heaven. Few persons have

experience of the exquisite taste of this bread of Angels, the Flesh of the Lamb without spot. But they who have been made firm by Jesus Christ in His love, and who, to please Him, have renounced all the satisfactions of the senses, sometimes taste in Communion these holy delights, which purity alone can cause to be experienced, when it is tasted in itself; for truth, charity, and the divine beauty, then become the food of the children of God.

The soul to which our Lord grants this grace, carries away from Communion an impression of God which ravishes her, and which she can neither explain nor comprehend; she can only speak of it as S. Paul and the mystics speak of God, and of the treasures we have in Him, when we possess Himself. They say what He is not, being unable to say what He is. They say that the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, nor the human mind comprehended anything like to it.

May Jesus Christ give us such a lively idea of the treasures He communicates in His sacred banquet, that it may make us abandon all that is not God. When empty of creatures we are ready to be filled with Him who should alone suffice us.

I am in Him, &c.

LETTER LXXVII.

To the same.

THE DISPOSITIONS HE WISHES HER TO HAVE AS A PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

Bordeaux, January 21, 1665.

The peace of Jesus Christ be in your heart, my very dear daughter. Now indeed you have need of it to dwell there, to sustain it in the state to which you are reduced through exhaustion. This state I imagine you now to be in, having to fight against the severity of the season, as well as against this consumption, which deprives you of strength, and brings you to death's door. We must, however, my dear daughter, consent to the will of God, and not resist, by our own will, anything that He commands. Considering that all the events which cross us are ordained by Providence, we should receive them peacefully as from His hand, and not be weary or discouraged. There is nothing so sweet as to obey God, when we do so with humble and loving respect, and know how profitable it is to us to consent to the ordinances of our Creator. To all that He wishes and commands say, "*Amen; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;*" that is to say, "in my body as in my spirit; and let all Thy designs be executed and accomplished in me. Let Thy creature render Thee a perfect obedience; let it not

have the slightest movement of life, but according to the order which Thou hast pronounced in Thine eternal counsel, the execution of which I prefer to all else. However severe may be the ordinances of God, I have an assured refuge in the adorable person of my Saviour Jesus Christ. It is upon Him, His own dear Son, He first pronounced sentence of death. Notwithstanding the privileges of His dignity and of His eternal generation, which exempted Him from the tribute common to all men, He has subjected Him to that law of death, from which He has dispensed no one. In consideration of the treatment to which Jesus Christ was subjected, obeying even to the death of the cross, I deliver myself up and abandon myself to all that my God may will to do with me; that I may bear His Son company; I submit to the law which He has condescended to undergo. With Him I accept the grief of the children of Adam; with all my heart I will pass where He has passed, and die with Him.

Thus, by the ordinance of my Creator, I put my soul into the hands of my Redeemer, so that having been washed in His Blood, I may become pleasing in the eyes of Him, who has taken me out of nothing. I consecrate and dedicate myself to Him to be the victim of His divine will, sacrificed in homage to His greatness. I most humbly beseech Him, no more to regard me according to what I am in myself, nor as clad in my natural colours, but according to what I am in His only Son, and as clothed with His merits and with His righteousness. May He forget what I am, and regard Jesus Christ alone in me. This,

O my Saviour and my God, is the only title, whose virtue I desire to plead, when I shall appear before Thee, being of myself but sin and abomination, and having of my own only misery and nothingness. But in Jesus Christ, and through Jesus Christ, Thou wilt look on me with a father's eyes and heart, as one of the members of this well-beloved Son, in whom Thou hast placed Thy whole affection, and I all my confidence."

Speak thus, my dear daughter, and with these sentiments, keeping your spirit profoundly abased, raise yourself to Jesus Christ with great love. Then with a holy impetuosity, so far as you are capable of it, spring to the Wound in His Side; cast yourself into it, and take up your abode in this holy cavern, the refuge of sinners, and keep yourself there sheltered from your enemies. God has permitted them formerly to approach you, but they have not been able to prevail against you. He has delivered you from their power, and, after having withdrawn you from their snares, He has given you as a safeguard and support Jesus Christ and His merits, His doctrine and His sufferings. Remain constantly bound to Him, and let no combats, in which you may engage, ever separate you from Him. Establish your dwelling in the midst of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. May the goodness of the Father, the sweetness of the Son, and the consolation of the Holy Spirit, flood your heart. Crowned with these graces, armed with this reinforcement, go to meet the Bridegroom. Finding you humble and truly penitent, He will tenderly embrace you, and will place you among His dear spouses. In Him, I am, &c.

LETTER LXXVIII.

To the Sister Marie Toru de Saint Alexis, Lay-Sister at the Convent of the Hospitallers of La Rochelle.

COUNSEL FOR A LAY-SISTER.

Saint Macaire, February 23, 1664.

I rejoice greatly at the success which our Lord has granted to your design, my dear Sister, and I pray Him to favour you with the benediction of His grace, to guide you in all things unto the end.

This benediction which I ask for you is that the spirit of grace and virtue may alone be your support in this undertaking. Do not look upon the Religious state only as a state of repose. Look upon it as a means of better fulfilling your duties towards God. From this consideration, apply yourself seriously to the things which are necessary to it, in order to render Him your service.

Now our first study in the Religious life should be to correct our faults. So try to know your own, and beg the good Mothers to make them known to you. Consider that our Lord has called you into a holy Community, to serve there, and not merely to enjoy devotion there. Many persons of your rank, under the specious pretext of the Religious life, want to be always praying to

God, not from love of prayer, but from a love of repose, because while we are praying we cease to work. The consolation of your heart must indeed be to pray and to enter into the Mysteries of the life and death of Jesus Christ, but you must do this in order to render Him the service He expects from you, which is to serve your Sisters and the poor. You will have, therefore, to conquer your natural fastidiousness: but, as you are in the house of charity, the spirit of charity will soften all to you. Do not let your courage faint or grow cold. Since our Lord has granted you the grace of being received into His house, renew your spirit from time to time, so as to maintain it always in its vigour. Give my respects, if you please, to those good Mothers of whom you speak to me, especially Mother Martha. There is no great likelihood of our seeing each other, because I am already old. When I can do anything for her consolation, I shall do it gladly. Let us fix our eyes upon the eternal future to which we are destined, making no account of what is passing. Let us do nothing and plan to do nothing but in Jesus Christ, who is all-powerful and eternal. Consider that He alone deserves to be loved, and served with our whole heart, and let us do all for love of Him, and from a great desire to content Him.

My dear Sister, never lose sight of eternity, nor of what God has done to purchase for you treasures that have no end. Do not entangle yourself in anything little. Go to God by love and by generosity of heart. Avoid human respect, and never do anything from the consideration of creatures only; but in all things seek sincerely the

glory of God. Live in peace with every one. Keep yourself always below all the rest, and make obedience your pleasure. If you have only eyes to see it, you will find in it a great treasure.

Believe that I am, &c.

LETTER LXXIX.

To Madame du Houx

FOR THE MOTHER JANE OF THE ANGELS, EXTREMELY SICK

Bordeaux, January 21, 1665.

I write to beg of you, Madame, to render to our dear daughter all the charitable assistance of which she may stand in need in the state I have heard she is in, for she is represented to me as almost at the point of death. Comfort and strengthen her mind, that, with her heart prostrate before God in all humility, with true contrition for her sins and past negligences, she may rest with perfect confidence in the merits of Jesus Christ, and place her whole reliance in the strength of His grace, which never fails those who hope for all things from it. Draw her, I pray you, gently to rest herself upon the sacred Side of Jesus, that opening which gives us entrance into His Heart, to secure us against the attacks of our enemies. Let her shield be faith, and let the experience of so many mercies which the Saviour has accorded her, serve her as a

pillow upon which to rest her head. Represent to her what the Son of God has suffered for us upon the cross, with so much love; that so those cruel enemies who have always persecuted her, may have no power to make her begin to mistrust the infinite loving kindnesses of God; a God who has prevented her with so many favours, that death has no power excepting over what is outside Jesus Christ, or contrary to Him. May she be so blessed in this her last journey, as to have recourse wholly to the Saviour of souls, resting all her hope upon His grace. If she die upon ashes, I mean in the spirit of true penitence, and profoundly humbled through the knowledge of her wretchedness and nothingness, let her lift herself up also in Jesus Christ by an ardent faith in His divinity, clinging to Him as to the Sovereign Lord, to whom all the powers of heaven, earth, and hell, yield; applying to Him, and invoking Him by the intervention of His holy Mother and of S. Joseph, under whose protection let her deliver and abandon herself to Him for ever, as to Him whom she should love above all things whatsoever.

In Him, I am, &c.

LETTER LXXX.

To the same.

Upon the same subject.

January 26, 1665.

May my dear daughter, Mother Jane of the Angels, enjoy a sweet repose in the open Side of Jesus Christ, so that in all her desolation she may remain firm in this retreat. Let it be to her a place not only of peace, but also of joy, and let her constantly dwell there. There let her sleep her last sleep, first closing her eyes to the things of earth by a sweet contemplation of the eternal treasures, and then by closing them by that last fainting, which will cause her soul to pass to the clear vision of God. Let her mind give full scope to this thought, that the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, being the resting place of her heart, as He is the object of her love, nothing ought to be capable of disquieting or grieving her. Her toils being now ended, the winds and tempests having ceased, let her stretch herself freely in this delicious bed, and say with the prophet king: "*This is my abode for ever and ever; I will make it my dwelling, since I have chosen it.*" Here I will finish my course, and here I purpose to quiet all the motions of my heart. This is what I have aspired to so many years. Here I have found "*the peace that passeth all understanding.*" May

my dear daughter enjoy this happy peace for all eternity; assuring her that I am, in Jesus Christ, dying and dead for love of us,

Her most humble servant.

LETTER LXXXI.

To the same.*

UPON THE SAME SUBJECT.

January 30, 1665.

Madame, the peace of Jesus Christ. I beseech Him to give it to you abundantly, and to the poor invalid. To possess this peace such as I wish for her, the heart must have no desire which is not formed in us by the Holy Spirit. For those desires, which He forms, never bring with them any trouble or agitation, contrary to the peace of God. I would that upon this occasion, our dear daughter should give our Lord all that she can give Him, renouncing, for love of Him, and through her dependence upon His guidance, all she may esteem important to her. In particular I would wish that she should resign unreservedly to Him, and from her whole heart, the desire she had of seeing me, and the hope she was beginning to entertain of the accomplishment of this desire. Let

* The Mother Jane of the Angels was alread dead when this letter was written.

her absolutely detach herself from it, burying all in the divine will, whose hidden springs are impenetrable to our minds. It is sufficient for us to see the deference that God pays to the human will of those upon whom we depend. If He does not choose to use His power to accomplish the desires of His faithful servants, their submission to His commands must be so great, their detachment from themselves so perfect, that nothing shall prevent them from being fully at peace within, with an entire indifference to all created things. I beseech this, my dear daughter, to abandon generally all her interests, except those that regard her salvation, and all her schemes. Let her die even before death to all that is created, giving up into the hands of God all He may seem to have promised her by the motions of His grace; cutting off all anxious desires she may have in her mind, and losing hold of everything human in utter nakedness of spirit. After that, when her heart shall have secured these holy dispositions, I shall be able willingly to give her my blessing, so that he may go away joyfully to Him who has created her for His glory.

In Him, I am, &c.

He says to her in another letter of the 4th of February:

I should wish our dear daughter to take up her abode in the loving Wound of Jesus. In that sacred Side the Saints, the most ardent in love, have happily taken up their dwelling, and have found in it their rest, their nourishment, and their delight. May the Lord make her rest upon His

Heart; may He, in that sweet resting place, give her to sleep the sleep of His holy peace, that nothing may wake her up nor trouble her, in her perfect acquiescence to the holy will of God. Recall to her mind from time to time the Passion of Jesus, which is the source of the life of the soul and its whole consolation. With the remembrance of the sufferings of this divine Spouse, procure for her further the benefit of being often admitted to His divine banquet, in it to receive His Body and His Blood, the precious pledge of the future life; that, intoxicated with these holy delights, she may almost forget her past faults, and no longer recollect anything but the mercies she looks for in peace from Him, who has prevented her with His graces. Oh, may she ever fix her eyes upon Him, that, transported with His love, she may keep herself constantly united to Him until her latest breath. I pray Him, may the God of mercy uphold her with His all-powerful arm, and strengthen her by His help, so that in the midst of the ills which weigh down the body, her spirit may be always faithful in carrying the cross, and in consummating its sacrifice upon the cross. Present ills quickly pass, and the rest which follows them is eternal. May she rely solely upon the merits of Jesus Christ, and rest in His mercy.

LETTER LXXXII.

To the Mother Teresa of Jesus, an Ursuline at Loudun.

THAT TO ADVANCE IN THE WAYS OF GRACE, WE MUST WORK WELL ON OUR PART, AND ALLOW OURSELVES TO BE GUIDED WITH A CHILD-LIKE DOCILITY.

February 17, 1658.

What you have told me in opening your heart to me, my dear daughter, shows me that God has a special care of your soul, and that in consequence of the graces He has already granted you, He is still ready to give you fresh graces, and even greater ones, if you only bring the disposition He requires. There is much to be hoped for from you. All depends on your resolution. The ways that lead to God are different. Some are so prevented by grace, that it scarcely leaves them anything but the trouble of following its attraction. God requires of others that they advance by their toil, and He helps them only in proportion to the efforts they make to acquire perfection. For yourself, my dear Sister, you perhaps do not give to it enough study or diligence. If you could give your Superiors full power over your soul, begging them to mortify you, to humble you, and to punish you according to the prudence of their zeal, our Lord would accept your courage, and the fidelity thus shown to Him would be well

rewarded. It would be to you the means of making very great progress. Many souls do very little indeed; they want God to do everything, by relieving them, so to speak, of the burden of their correspondence. That is not fair. If the creature, on her side, co-operates constantly, and toils unceasingly for a considerable time, she sometimes draws immense treasures from our Lord; for He has said, "*Knock at the door, and it shall be opened to you.*" The effort you must make consists in what I have told you. Submit yourself like a child to the guidance of obedience, give your Mothers full liberty to dispose of you as they judge best, and, on your part, embrace in earnest interior mortification. Practice it two full years in succession without relaxation or discouragement.

God is kind; a little thing satisfies Him. The effort the soul makes is pleasing to Him; although He sees that what she does is nothing in itself, He, nevertheless, does not say that it is nothing. His just and merciful charity makes Him judge it to be something which merits a reward. But slothful souls are always expecting, always delaying; they complain unceasingly, are disconsolate, and do nothing. Our Lord will say to them: "*Why do you do nothing on your side? Is heaven to cost nothing? Are My grace and My love things of no value?*" Let us learn, my dear Sister, to humble and mortify ourselves. Let us sincerely and constantly study these two virtues. Remember the trouble we took to learn to read and write. What does not each one do in order to excel in his profession? Artisans,

soldiers, merchants, and every one, make it their study to know their trade well. Shall we be the only ones who neglect ours? If you work, you will be paid, and your payment will be interior peace and divine love, sweetness in the practice of what is good, and the possession of real virtues. Begin from this instant, my dear Sister, and do not henceforward turn over in your mind other plan than how you may love God perfectly, searching continually for the means of doing so. I have now told you the best I can.

I am, &c.

LETTER LXXXIII.

To the same.

upon the same subject.

March 24, 1658.

I see clearly by your letter, my dear daughter, that our Lord has touched your heart, and I am greatly rejoiced at it. I beg you to take your part of the common letter, which I write to the Mother Superior. Imagine that it is for yourself alone. Pay no attention to discouragement nor to feelings which oppose your aim of belonging altogether to God. But give yourself up blindly to the discretion of her amongst those good mothers, to whom Providence has entrusted the care of your guidance. Be as a child in her

hands. You need to go through that for a certain time, and if you could reduce yourself to that humble docility, our Lord would give you great caresses, and fill your heart with contentedness. Fight against all your enemies, that is, your natural failings, and pursue them to the end, not being astonished at the trouble and difficulty you have with them. If you attack them vigorously, they will fly from before you. Deliver yourself up entirely either to Mother Jane of the Angels, or to the Mother-Superior, and give them full power over your soul, so that our Lord may give you a full and entire benediction. Stop short at nothing: close your ears to the suggestions of false wisdom. You will find the true wisdom in becoming a child, renouncing all your rights, espousing the cross, and subjecting yourself to the interior movements of divine virtue. We should love their constraint, since they press upon us only to lead us to what is good. Observe the principal impulses of your heart, be they good or bad, and give an account of them. Give up the love of your body: the release from that slavery will be a great help to you for advancing in virtue, and for acquiring the spirit of prayer. Your portion, and the dowry you should bring to Jesus Christ your Spouse, is interior recollection, the mortification of your natural inclinations, and detachment from all creatures. This will make you free to give yourself wholly to Him to whom you should belong without reserve.

In Him I am, &c.

LETTER LXXXIV.

To the same.

HE TEACHES HER TO FOLLOW THE DIRECTION OF GOD.

February 6, 1661.

I have received your last letter of the 16th of January, my dear daughter, and I seem to behold the continuance of grace; I do not know if your co-operation is such as I would have it be, entire and faithful; if your arguments are thoroughly beaten down; if you no longer hearken to that natural wisdom in which you abound? The wisdom which our Lord desires of you is altogether simplicity and obedience. I recognize grace in the movements God gives you to accept His direction, and to keep yourself inviolably attached to it. The direction of God declares itself by His providence and by His grace. I put obedience in the order of providence, and I say that God manifests His providence by the exigencies of things and by the commands of Superiors; and grace manifests itself, and makes itself known by its drawings. We should generally have them examined by our Directors and Superiors, and so soon as they have approved them, we should prostrate our heart in an entire submission. When you abandon yourself to the cross and to humiliation, nature shudders, and the dark vapours which rise up in the mind obscure the light which leads

to the cross and to the love of abjection. The dark vapours are the reasonings of human prudence, which, when they are listened to, pervert our minds, and make us lose the heavenly light. You will dissipate them by always keeping to faith, to the doctrine of the Saints, and to the opinion of your Superior, with this aim blindly renouncing your own ideas. You tell me of a vow which you would like to make. I do not well understand in what it would consist; for you say you would like that the Superior should not be able to withdraw you from the mean office you embrace; and that, because of the obligation you will have imposed upon yourself. It does not seem to me practicable that your vow should bind your Superior. So let us see your intentions clearly, and make them reasonable. When you have thoroughly made your scheme clear, I see nothing inconvenient in your proposing it to your Mother-Superior, referring it to her judgment.

My dear daughter, always be pliable to the movements of grace, so as to abandon yourself like a child to obedience, never to separate yourself from the guidance of the Holy Spirit, never to close your ear to His secret reprimands, and to dwell united with all your Sisters by a cordial charity, and by a humble and sweet compliance with what they desire of you.

LETTER LXXXV.

To the Mother Elizabeth of the Cross, an Ursuline at Loudun.

COUNSEL FOR THE GUIDANCE OF THE YOUNG NUNS.

August 10, 1658.

Divine Providence has given you an employment most useful for your own perfection, in charging you with the guidance of the young Nuns. Make it your study, my dear Mother, to stablish them firmly in the single aim of esteeming nothing but God, so that they may not let themselves be affected by any other consideration but that of God's honour and service. By this means you will raise up their hearts, and will soon lead them to the height of virtue; and, although their faults be not so soon cut away, they will have wherewith to uproot them gently and effectually. You must early accustom them to renounce their own wills, to die to their passions, and to set their hearts above all creatures; getting them first to be ashamed of the instincts of corrupt nature, which are opposed to a perfect freedom of heart. Reprehend also all kinds of attachments to any creature whatsoever, and under whatever pretext. This renunciation will lead them straight to charity, and thereby you will render them docile to the movements of grace. They should have the mind of a child in their piety towards God; be charitable

towards their neighbours, and obedient to Superiors. They should be without any ostentation or self-esteem, being pliable to the will of others, esteem nothing despicable nor too mean for them. To get thus far they must habituate themselves to be mortified by contempt and by abjection, so that all may become sweet and easy to them. It is also most important to recommend to them brotherly love, getting them to love each other cordially as Sisters, through the consideration of our being all the children of Jesus Christ. Impress upon them a great horror of the spirit of the world and of its manners, its intrigues, and its policy, its insincerities, flatteries, its compliments, and its affected ways of writing and speaking.

Let them observe an extreme simplicity in all things, strive to make them regard with aversion all kinds of purely human culture of the mind, that they may learn to prize only true virtue, peace, recollection, gentleness, patience, a benevolent interpretation of all that is done to them, familiarity with God, and the meditation on the life, death, and bitter Passion of Jesus Christ. In short, they should aim at an entire conversion of heart to our Lord, and the holy exercise of His love; in these they will find their true happiness. They should be made thoroughly to understand that the shortest way to attain to it is the mortification of all natural inclinations, our appetites, our tastes, our pleasures, and all kinds of vain excellences. Ancient Nuns, that have not these dispositions, have great cause to be confounded. At least we must try to get the young ones well disposed, so that Religion may be the orchard or the

garden of delights of our Lord; for I assure you that the Communities in which persons pay attention to their honour and to their ease, where they are shocked by some less respectful words, where great complaints are made when the Superior mortifies or commands freely, are in truth vines of Jesus Christ, but vines uncultured, and the fruit gathered from them is sour.

I pray the divine light to enlighten you, to give to these young souls the milk of grace, and to nourish them with truth. Be assured that all persons who are slaves to their interests, and complain that they are not considered, are very far from the window, by which the light of truth comes in; they are in some dark corner, where they scarce see anything clearly, and all their work feels the effect of it. Heaven only enlightens souls that are fervent in mortifying themselves, amorous of contempt, desirous of humiliations, who suffer with pleasure scorn and abandonment, to be forgotten, and treated as Novices. And why, my dear daughter, do you suppose that our Lord has done so many and such extraordinary things in your house? Why has He given so many and such marvellous protections? Why has He bestowed on you poor Sisters, despised and abandoned by the world, such a splendid victory over the powers of darkness? Why so many prodigies of grace, which dazzle your eyes, so to speak, if not to persuade the daughters of S. Joseph to give themselves up to virtue? But to what virtue? It is not the virtue of the slothful He calls you to, who only seek for rest, and to fulfil all their own likings. It is to true virtue, which consists in

the complete death of nature, in the abasement o
our pride, in suffering others to reprove us, and i
thanking those who do us this charity; in lovin
others cordially, unrepelled by manners that dis
please us and are not to our taste; in submittin
ourselves even to those whom we do not esteem
in considering God in all things, and not our ow
self-love; for self-love always inclines us to desi
to have the best clothes, the best furniture, th
best room, and the best morsels; all, in short
which is in accordance with the appetite.

The true spouse of Jesus Christ mortifies her
self in all things, and tears herself away from wha
pleases her senses. She likes to be neglected an
to be given what is worst. She does not say
"*That person does not love me; this one neve
considers me.*" It is self-love that speaks thus
It is that which says: "*That Sister, that Mothe
has never shown me that what I did pleased her
How is one to live, if people do not thank one fo
the good that one does!*" The soul that is fer
vent, that finds her rest in prayer, and her conso
lation in Jesus Christ crucified, scarcely trouble
herself as to whether she is frowned upon or no
and does not walk with a view to creatures. He
eyes are open only to the grand objects of faith
God, Jesus Christ, paradise, the judgment day
death whose hour draws near, and then the truth
will be seen. Then the soul that has taken
delight in mortifying herself, in growing in th
love of God, and of her neighbour, will feel a con
solation without compare. But she who has bee
always occupied with the care of her body, i
punctiliously insisting upon her rights and in

terests, will experience a most strange confusion when she has to appear before the humblest of men, raised as He is now to the glory of the sovereign power in reward for His self-humiliation. When He shows her the kindness with which He prevented her by calling her to the Religious state, the helps which He gave her in Religion to sanctify herself; the prodigies which He performed before her eyes to persuade her generously to combat her natural inclinations, and to obtain a full victory over herself; oh, then, how will she be able to endure the reproaches of a wrathful Bridegroom, who will call her to give account of her fidelity, and will make her feel the obligation she was under of sacrificing all to His love, and of being wholly spent in His service? How terrible is the severity of such a Bridegroom! What will this slothful and lukewarm spouse answer Him! Will she say, to excuse herself: "*I have not done such and such sins?*" Even, though she have not committed them, though she be not wholly like to worldlings, daughters of Sodom and Gomorrah, yet, if she have not corresponded to the graces she has received, what can she reply? I could find enough matter here to give a subject of perpetual meditation.

At the hour of death truth will be known such as it is; so I ought to believe that what will then give me pain and regret, should now be considered as pure folly. Let us strive, then, always to be in such dispositions as we would wish to have, if we had to die the same day. Let us give all our esteem and affection to what will appear to us, in that last moment of our life,

worthy of being esteemed and loved. Let us free ourselves from all those things, the remembrance of which would then only displease us. Let us strive, with all our might, to become really virtuous, to subdue our pride; to get the spirit of that holy childhood which our Lord has so much commended; to keep strict silence, so that our heart may always be fit to treat with our Lord; to mortify our body by penance, to prevent our neighbour by all sorts of kind offices; to give no place at all to the vanities, curiosities, and familiarities, which hinder liberty of heart. For time presses, the Judge is at the door, and our enemies make every effort to amuse us with trifles, so as to turn aside our minds from the attention they should pay to these great matters. If we do not take heed, we shall allow ourselves to be enchanted by the fashion of this world, which is but a passing show, having nothing stable or solid about it. We run after phantoms and mist, and, unless we take care, we shall spend that time, which is so precious, in the service of creatures, busied in pleasing this one or that; in seeking for diversions such as only satisfy the senses, and in filling the mind and heart with a thousand things which can only bring us sorrow and regret. I pray God to open our eyes once for all, so that having awakened us from our drowsiness, He may not allow us any more to fall into it.

LETTER LXXXVI.

To the same.

UPON THE SAME SUBJECT.

September 18, 1658.

Do your best, my dear Mother, for these good little souls, striving to draw them out of the low estate of nature, and to set them up above themselves. For girls' minds are generally such that they either give themselves altogether to grace, or yield altogether to the instincts of nature. Encourage them to detach themselves from all things, as far as their weakness permits, and gently insinuate into their minds those truths which may so influence them as to make them subject themselves generously to the yoke of Jesus Christ. It is scarcely right to leave them in ignorance of the points of perfection, to which the Religious state obliges them, but they must be made to relish them from the sweetness which is to be found mingled with them, animating them always to yet higher undertakings, to a perfect stripping off of all, to the love of sufferings, and the desire of abjection and contempt.

I assure you that youth is capable of great illuminations, though it often does not accomplish all it learns. They must be won by love, and be treated with great gentleness. Nothing should be done to cause them sharp and sensible pain, until

their consent has been first obtained. For we can do all things when we will, although human weakness wonders at it. Mademoiselle d'Ars has a good and docile disposition, if she hearkens to grace. She must go to our Lord with love and confidence, with all her heart, and not with half heart only. One of the virtues most necessary for her, is that she abandon herself to obedience, so letting others humble her, mortify her, and dispose of her as they like. She ought to allow herself thus to be freely dealt with. Then she will be really Frances Angelica, and the Angels will truly dwell with her. Let her accustom herself to control the impulses of her heart, never allowing them to follow nature, but turning them towards the drawings of grace. These high and generous movements of grace urge us so utterly to abandon ourselves, as to be willing to be trampled underfoot by all the world. If that dear child wills this, she will then enter into the enjoyment of the treasures hidden in Jesus Christ, and will experience the delights of His love. These delights are ever near to us; but some trifles coming between us and them, prevent our enjoying them, and rendering a perfect service to our God.

Lead souls by this path, my dear Mother; get them to rise to this generosity; you will thus do them a service which will render them really happy. My kind regards, if you please, to Mother Jane of the Angels. I am not so strong as I was when I wrote you my last letter. That was indeed written in accordance with the ardour of my heart, and the zeal I have for all your Community. Remember me especially to your dear Novices,

and particularly to the last comer, whom I exhort to give herself up to her first fervour.

Believe that I am, &c.

LETTER LXXXVII.

To the same.

COUNSEL TOUCHING PENANCES, PRAYER AND COMMUNION.

To satisfy your enquiries, which show how much you desire to please our Lord, let me tell you, my dear Mother:

1. Touching penances: that Superiors often spare those too much who ask for them. We should hold it for certain that we acquire incomparable treasures, when we follow the impulses of grace, which inclines to perform many penances; but the routine is to permit few. Provided we have good health, what makes the body suffer is extremely useful to excite fervour; above all, the discipline taken with an interior spirit produces this effect, and does not destroy our strength.

2. Your practice of taking refuge in the Wounds of Jesus Christ is excellent, and proceeds from grace. By these sacred doorways, you may take up your abode in Him, and unite yourself perfectly to Him.

3. Your employment in taking care of the little girls is most holy. I envy souls who set themselves to this exercise of zeal. It is shunned for

want of an ardent charity, or from the dread of being drawn too much out of one's self. For each one wishes to be left to himself that his desires may have free play.

4. Your manner of prayer is good. The more you keep yourself at rest with our Lord, without being too eager, the more He will love you, finding you prepared to give place to His grace.

5. As to Communions, I should cut off two days in the week, until our Lord made known His will more clearly. Your chief effort should be to avoid the wanderings of the mind, and to keep yourself, during the course of the day, as attentive to God as you are on those occasions when your feelings are wounded. You must strive to render yourself devoutly insensible; to accept of being treated harshly, and of not having your feelings considered. The mortification of the body is very useful for this.

Finally, my dear Mother, you must absolutely determine to suffer no longer in yourself any impulse which is not of grace, to stifle all those of nature, and in all things to seek only the good pleasure of God. Zeal for souls, and the death of all that does not proceed from the will of God and from grace, should be the nourishment of your soul. You ought to have an insatiable hunger and thirst after Jesus Christ, desiring Him unceasingly, and sighing day and night after Him. When you are closely united to Him, and are unable to live without Him, it will then be advantageous to you to communicate every day. Give Him your whole heart, and be His faithful spouse finding joy in Him only, and taking pleasure in

suffering for love of Him; for thus best do we give Him marks of our love. It is by the cross that we enter into the secret of His Heart, and then we passionately love scorn, contempt, and contradictions. We make them our delight, and are incited to make our flesh suffer. When once you have these sentiments in your heart, you will be truly the spouse of Jesus. May this be your lot.

LETTER LXXXVIII.

To the same.

He exhorts her to detach herself perfectly from created things, and to abandon herself entirely to God.

I see that our Lord has elevated your soul, and made it much stronger and better than in time past. Correspond with this grace, my dear mother, being entirely abandoned to all that it shall please Him to work in you by His grace. Keep your heart attentive to Him and submissive to all good impulses. Trample underfoot human considerations and your own interests, above all, that of requiring reparation. Do not trouble yourself as to how your Novices correspond to your affection and the care you take of them. Be indifferent to all things, except to pleasing God. Abandon yourself also to His holy Providence, dying to all things, even to yourself, in all contrary events.

Consider as nothing all that is purely human, being affected only by what relates to God, as a creature that is wholly sacrificed to Him, to be His victim by the cross and by love to Him with His Son Jesus Christ, if it be His good pleasure.

Do not, my dear Mother, amuse yourself any longer with your interests. Be like a soul lost in God, who has no desires but to have leisure and freedom to attend to God, and to serve Him. Look at nothing in the world but the service of God. Be insensible to all else, and do not be hurt at creatures being discontented with you, even though it should be partly your fault; be sensible only to the displeasure of God. In what relates to your office, do not fix your attention either upon your capacity or your incapacity. That is of no use; but, without human respect, do what you judge best, inciting these young Sisters to every kind of perfection, with charity and gentleness. For love is the mighty spring of virtue: love is the attraction of grace.

Be tied in friendship only with strong generous souls, detached from all, and lovers of prayer. In a word, rise above nature and every created thing, to a region of purity, where you are stripped of all, and see only God, being attached to His holy will alone. Once more, my dear Mother, come forth from all that is low, and give up the meannesses and the cowardices of nature and of self-love.

Then you will belong to Jesus Christ, in whom I am, &c.

I know not what God will do with me as regards my body. I cannot leave my room at all.

LETTER LXXXIX.

To the same.

COUNSEL FOR HER CONDUCT WITH REGARD TO THE NOVICES.

August 31, 1659.

I maintain that I have answered all your letters, my dear Mother. As to the guidance of your Novices, ground yourself chiefly upon the assistance of the divine light; ask it unceasingly, and, by interior silence, give ear to what our Lord will say to you for each one in particular. For He informs us sweetly what is for the best, provided that we are not hurried or preoccupied. This preoccupation is a fault into which it is easy to fall. Nothing is more common than to let ourselves be anticipated by an impression. We must not be in such a hurry. We must wait for what God shall say to the heart. And for this cause you must be very peaceful in yourself, desiring the good of your dear daughters ardently, but without eagerness. You have now given yourself up to the service of God so long, you ought to have acquired the habit of easily yielding to the guidance of His Spirit. We attain to this when we have given ourselves entirely to Him, and have come to that pass that we seek His glory only, putting away from us all else. If you adorn yourself with any knowledge that our Lord has not given you, it will always be an obstacle; and, like a cloud in

your heart, will cause darkness and perplexity. You must unceasingly bring yourself back to the void of all that is your own, or proceeds from self; and then our Lord, seeing you free and attentive, will do in you what He does in those, of whom He makes use for the execution of His designs. He will pour His lights into your mind, and will make you to understand what it is He requires of you for the good of others. Three things will prepare you for this: purity of heart, interior peace, and a sincere desire of seeing God honoured in souls.

I am, &c.

LETTER XC.

To the same.

HE EXHORTS HER TO INTERIOR RECOLLECTION, AND TO THE PRACTICE OF VIRTUE.—EULOGY OF A BOOK ENTITLED "THE INTERIOR CHRISTIAN."

Saint Macaire, January 8, 1664.

Your letter of the 22nd of December comforts me, my dear Mother, because I see in it that your good desires continue. What you tell me of the book entitled "The Interior Christian," appears to me very well founded. It is most excellent in my opinion. I have said, and I say again, that if I had seen it before composing the "Spiritual Catechism," I should have believed my labour to be unnecessary: for I find that this book says all

that I wished to say when I determined to write, and I assure you that, if I had it to read, I would make it the ordinary food of my soul, so good and solid does it seem to me. But little reading suffices to nourish the soul. Our principal care should be the practice of what is good in order to please God; acting always in a spirit of peace, of humility, and charity; withdrawing ourselves from the frivolities and vanities of life, which drown us insensibly, carry us away, and cause our precious time to be employed in nothing.

My dear daughter, do what you can to be attentive to God. Let the things in which you are not obliged to take part slip by; let them pass with indifference; let all things come and go according to the will of everybody; provided that I have not to give an account of them to God, it should be all one to me. Let my heart be watchful and recollected, so as to attend to my soul, and have God present; that ought to be sufficient for me. When I shall have obtained this desired peace in my soul, I will then do what I can to acquire a familiar presence of God. And then, by seeing God, and by the strength which will come to me from so doing, I will do my little duty in the most perfect way I can, in whatever employment He wills to engage me, either by holy obedience or by my state. Thus my days will flow on in peace, without my burdening myself with useless cares and labours, which most persons embarrass themselves with, placing themselves in situations to which God calls them not. Let us then pass our life in peace, waiting for the coming of our Lord, who will not fail to manifest Himself to us when our

last sickness has led us to the gates of the other life. There He is waiting for us to wind up the affair of our eternity, and to award to us the recompense of His loving kindness, if we have been faithful to Him, or the severities of His justice, if we have been negligent in serving Him. What is there more just than to employ all our time and all our strength in loving and honouring Him, in gratitude for all the graces with which He has crowned us? Nothing, my dear daughter, nothing in this world is more important than to wait upon God, ever exercising ourselves in the things that serve to gain His good graces, such as humility, patience, obedience, the love of the cross, and the practice of charity. Apart from this, all is but vanity. Say so, if you please, from me to the Sister Martha, whom I am pleased to remember. May she be at peace in her interior. Say the same to Sister Mary of the Visitation. All these souls are dear to me, and I would wish before God to contribute something to their perfection. For all those who belong to the time of our conflict, and who have seen and touched, so to speak, the malignity and the misery of hell, seem to me to be souls singularly favoured of heaven. Tell Sister Angelica d'Ars, with my regards, that I recommend her to pass lightly over the good and over the ill of this life. Give my regards also to Mother Angelica, who perhaps is cured; I beg of her to take courage in her infirmity. I wrote to her, not eight days ago, a letter which proceeded from the very depths of my heart. I do not know whether she has received it, I addressed it

to Father Batide. I remain to all, and to you in particular, &c.

LETTER XCI.

To the same.*

Bordeaux, March 1, 1665.

I have just seen your letter of the 16th of February. My dear daughter, in answer to all that you tell me, I beseech you to give yourself wholly to God, and specially to bind yourself to the holy passion of Jesus Christ; to meditate upon it, enter deeply into it, and honour it. You bear the name of the cross; fulfil the duties of this great name. Be you, as well as the Son of God, a victim of the cross. Let His sufferings be the ordinary entertainment of your mind; let your promenade be the garden of Olives, the house of Caiphas, the judgment hall of Pilate, and the palace of Herod; let Calvary be your place of rest and lodging. You will find in this occupation an incredible sweetness. May it be to you the source of all your good. It will produce in your soul a real contempt of the world, perfect detachment from created things, and a tender love for Jesus Christ. Of all the adornments of the mind it is

* It is one of the last he wrote. As at the close of his life he was entirely occupied with the Passion of our Lord, he spoke of scarcely anything else to all to whom he wrote. This letter is a proof of it.

the most precious and the most desirable. Place, my dear daughter, all your affection in it, and our Lord will consider you as His spouse.

In Him, and in His grace, I am, &c.

LETTER XCII.

To the Mother Angelica of Saint Francis, an Ursuline at Loudun.*

THIS LETTER, AND THE SEVEN FOLLOWING, ARE TO STRENGTHEN HER IN THE SIMPLE WAY OF PERFECT RECOLLECTION AND PURE LOVE.

Transcend the objects which are to be met with in life, my dear Sister, and do not stop short until you have become entirely submissive to the direction of God. Prepare the depths of your soul for Him by a repose that reaches its inmost parts. Entrust yourself likewise into His hands, and never again take yourself back. Let Him dispose of you according to His good pleasure, and do not disturb His operation in you by the too great activity of your character. Make it a pleasure to yourself to dwell exposed to His love, and form no plan but by His orders. Believe firmly that all that He may permit to befall you, will always result to your advantage, provided that you take it as coming from Him, and that you seek His holy

* The Mother Frances Angelica de Pouillé, or Angelica of Saint Francis, was one of the most perfect souls of that time.

will only in all things. Maintain your spirit in such a grand elevation as never to let it be lowered to creaturely things. Live without care, without attachment, and without fear. Be well persuaded that Jesus Christ keeps up a holy intercourse of love with our souls, and that He directs us in all things, provided that we lean upon Him by faith, and that we desire only Him; that we trust in His goodness; that we do not prevent Him from acting, and that we do not interrupt His action by the eagerness and indiscretion of our anxious activity. You are His spouse; if you will be His only, He will raise you to heights which will be a subject of eternal admiration to you. Fix your attention upon your interior soul, my dear Sister, and upon the plan that our Lord has traced out for you in it. Be assured that He has given me a tender affection for you, &c.

JEAN JOSEPH.

LETTER XCIII.

TO THE SAME.

I have much joy, my dear Sister, in seeing in your letter the progress of your soul. If God wants you altogether for His love, give yourself to Him without reserve. To give yourself to Him, is to let Him alone, not disturbing either His designs for you by your anxious cares, nor His divine operations by your own and over precipitate

action. Stay quiet under His good pleasure, and under His all-powerful hand; sacrifice to Him all the impulses of the heart, produced for its own interests, excepting those for your beatitude. Keep yourself perfectly open to His gaze, and ever awaiting His commands. Rest yourself under the shadow of His cross. That, my very dear Sister, is the best way of giving yourself to Him. Do not seek, out of self-love, to see what is taking place in you, to make sure of your state. But in your doubts, remain lost in God, awaiting His light, which will never fail you, and which does not want your human eagerness. Let your desire and care be only to do His holy will, obeying those most clear and most sweet instincts with which He inspires you, when it shall please Him to make you feel them. Multitudes of travellers present themselves to us to be led into the land of pure love. But we only choose persons determined to suffer all things. Few persons are found capable of making great advances in the road which leads to their proposed terminus, because there are but very few who will subject their reason. This subjection is troublesome to nature, but grace sweetens all things, and we hope for great assistance from it. Have the courage to renounce your own light, and you will be very well received.

I am, &c.

LETTER XCIV

To the same.

You will find nothing more useful to your advancement, in the state in which you are, my dear Sister, than that deep rest, and that universal discharging of yourself and of all things into the arms of holy love, without taking other ca e than that of pleasing Him, and wi hout analysing your dispositions. Anxieties, perplexities, temptations, will swarm in your heart. You will pass by a way you know not. Often you will think yourself about to be lost;—but courage; this is necessary for you to come out of your own land, and to enter into that which our Lord has prepared for you. Constantly follow in His train, do not turn your head, or ever look behind you. When God chooses fully to possess a soul, He oversets everything in her, and even goes so far as to separate her from herself. What was most familiar to her, even in divine things, becomes, as it were, strange to her. Her knowledge, which was gross and low, is taken away from her, but she is to receive instead what is pure and perfect. Her fervour and her good feelings are taken from her. She thinks that all is lost; but she is despoiled only to be enriched, and to be the better adorned. Nevertheless, as she is not sufficiently prepared for what is destined for her, she must remain poor

and content with her poverty, under the direction of love, which is faithful to her, and which does not fail to assist her in all things. So, my dear Sister, persevere courageously in that resignation which you have made of all your interests into the hands of God. You have abandoned all to Him, even your soul. He will take care of all. He will instruct you in all things, provided you have a little patience. Only do not trouble yourself about anything, but keep your mind ever free, and your heart ever peaceful, and invariably attached to the laws of holy love. Be of good courage.

I am, &c.

LETTER XCV.

To the same.

Bordeaux, November 3, 1636.

It is with much joy, my dear Sister, that I learn the continuance of the good dispositions in which I left your soul at my departure. I wish they may augment more and more, but, above all, that great desire you have of your beatitude, that entire abandonment of yourself to God, that perfect subjection to His power, with a continual peace and tranquillity, which will free you from all kinds of cares, and draw you out of your own operations. Remain as though dead at the feet of God in a profound recollection, almost as much lost and

annihilated as if you had never been capable of any impulse of your own. All your own movements must be abandoned to the direction of God, and must render homage to His power. Bear with patience the cross of your natural impurity, when God makes it known to you, and on your part try always to blind yourself, so as to see nothing but the present dispositions in which you are placed by God. Turn away your eyes from every object but that of divine love. Do not seek to have any other disposition than that of a respectful and docile little child. God prepares great things for you if you persevere, my Sister, and if you keep the way of repose and of sincere dependence. Your Mother-Superior must lead you and rule you, as though you were one of those little tamed animals, with whom one does all that one wills. She must have a right to be mistress of your reason, and to make it a slave to the instincts which should subject you to the Spirit of God. The less you make use of your liberty and of your reason, that instead you may transfer it all to God, the more you will make yourself conformable to Jesus Christ. Do not lose the grace that He has given you, I pray you, my dear Sister. Guard it as the apple of your eye. Take good care not to enlist under the guidance of any person, who made you leave the way of recollection, to bring you back to your natural manner of acting. Keep to the light which our Lord gave you in your retreat. I beseech Him with all my heart to grant you this grace.

In Him, I am, &c.

LETTER XCVI.

To the same.

Bordeaux, December 3, 1636.

I am extremely comforted to see from your letters, my dear Sister, the mercy that God exercised towards you. It is a very great one, in that He employs His power to fully subject you to Himself. You do well to consent to His operation, and to give yourself up to His power. You must do it without reserve, disburdening yourself of all kinds of cares, as much as it is possible for you. You ought, my dear Sister, with regard to all that affects you, excepting your salvation, to return, in a manner, into your nothingness. From the moment you feel yourself, and you love your corrupted being, you will be like one damned. Lose yourself then in God; let His greatness which absorbs you work in you; do not interfere in anything with human eagerness; but abandon yourself to this ruling Being, who will lead you by love, purify your soul, illuminating it and transforming it altogether into Himself. Be very careful not to take up the care of your interests again with too much anxiety, or to diminish the disposition of simplicity to which grace reduces you. Die to all anxious reflections upon yourself. Your Spouse and your King wishes to put an end to your miseries, and to transfer you into the

delights of His kingdom, provided you let Him alone. Keep yourself tightly bound to that pillar to which I advised you to tie yourself; and, in this situation, as if you were quite insensible, receive all the various events, whether of favour or of severity, without helping anything to them on your part, but a very simple consent. You have no longer a right either to rejoice, nor to stop short at, nor to desire anything but grace, your perfection and your salvation. Only remain abandoned to the discretion of love, which, operating in you according to its good pleasure and its most wise guidance, will take its satisfaction in its work. It desires of you, as homage, your acquiescence; it will hold itself better satisfied with this than by all the sacrifices you could offer against its divine will. Acquiesce with peace, with gentleness, and with love, in the reign of this divine love, and glorify it by your silence and by your suffering; by a holy abandonment, and by a delicious death in its arms. Let that be your only care upon earth. If God grant me the grace of being able to help you to fulfil His designs, I wish it ardently, and I will not cease to do so as long as I shall have occasion. I am pleased that you make use of the Mother-Superior for your guidance. God bless your simplicity and your obedience. Adieu, my dear Sister; believe that I am, &c.

LETTER XCVII.

To the same.

Bordeaux, December 26, 1636.

I have nothing to say to you upon your state, which you make known to me in your letter, my dear Sister, except that you ought to remain ever constantly exposed to the operations of God, without giving your opinion in your heart secretly upon any thing at all that may happen to you, and without wishing to penetrate it. Stay simply in the nakedness of faith, and in a spirit of entire renunciation, to allow the Divine Being to rule completely in you. Keep your soul in peace, and, as it were, insensible to all things; in a state of death, crucified, buried, lost, and engulfed in God. Do not set your affections upon any creature, raise them above all that is not God, and, keeping them thus abstracted, follow the instinct of love by which our Lord will appropriate you, to do something for His service.

Silence and freedom of heart should be your portion amidst the tumult and captivity of this world. Let people say or do all that they will. Let them come, let them go, let all be overturned; on your part, remain firm and immoveable, resting in the bosom of God and in the experience of His love. Adieu, my dear Sister.

LETTER XCVIII

To the same.

Bordeaux, April 8, 1637.

I have received some of your letters, in which I see your state of poverty and suffering. See, my dear Sister, what it is to abandon oneself to God. When a soul has had the courage to resign herself entirely into His hands, He does not fail to purify her by His severities, and to lead her by that way of privation to the great treasures He wants to give her, as a reward for the abandonment she has made to Him of her interests and of herself.

Do you repent of having thus given yourself to God? Would you retract and turn back from it now that you are reduced under His power? Suffer, my Sister, suffer and hope in Him who is most faithful, and who, by His pain, which is but for a moment, prepares in your heart a place for Himself, to rest there eternally. Remain in your simple recollectedness in the midst of your troubles, and confine yourself to looking only at the Sovereign Physician who orders you this remedy. Take it as from His hand. Be faithful in not seeking any alleviation from created things, and in not strengthening yourself in yourself by your own anxious operations, which will always be prejudicial to you. Let the divine ordinance be to

you all in all; steep yourself in it, making no more account of yourself than of a dead animal, brought to nothing. The sovereign power of Him who tries you will draw you out of death and nothingness, since He died to give you life. Belong altogether to Him as to your true Bridegroom, altogether consecrated to His love, altogether left to His disposal as His spouse, entirely hidden and lost in Him. He will consume and absorb you holily into Himself by the secret operations, which make you suffer and groan. You must give a full consent to them, as His creature, and the most happy slave of His love. Adieu, my Sister; be of good courage.

LETTER XCIX.

To THE SAME.

Bordeaux, May, 30, 1637.

Courage in poverty, my dear Sister; it will bring you riches; a great unburdening of ourselves into God; a great abandonment to His love. Have confidence in that love, which will draw the poor man out of his misery; and make no difficulty whatever of losing all things excepting grace and eternal beatitude. The more you lose, the more gain God will make of you. Remain absolutely exposed, forsaken, and stripped of all that you have ever possessed. Prepare to see new worlds, and to experience various things at

God's good pleasure. In this way you will be brought under to the power of love. Be His prey and His conquest for ever, and praise His mercy. Adieu, my Sister.

LETTER C.

To the same.

COUNSEL FOR HERSELF, AND FOR THE COMMUNITY OF WHICH SHE WAS SUPERIOR.

February 5, 1658.

Your letter, my dear Mother, has been most pleasing to me in all that it contains, as much regarding the state of your own soul, as regarding that of all your Sisters. I believe that what is most proper for you, is to render yourself faithfully attentive to God and submissive to His grace, accomplishing all that you know He desires of you, and giving Him leave to do in you all that it may please Him. You can only help towards this by keeping your soul peaceful, pure, and far from all evil; getting your Sisters to apply themselves steadfastly to the exercise of all virtues, and to the practice of Religion; flying all kinds of attachment to temporal good; committing all your affairs to God, and trusting in His providence; taking care that the spirit of recollection and of devotion reign among you; keeping up a spirit of mortification and of self-renunciation, without

which the Religious life has no great merit; finally, preserving union and brotherly love as the apple of your eye, and suffering nothing that is contrary to them. If love does not link hearts together, our Lord takes no pleasure in dwelling in them. I greatly desire that the grace He has done your Community, by restoring peace to it, and by delivering it from the attacks of hell, may have its full effect; subjecting all your hearts to the empire of Jesus Christ. You cannot, without extreme ingratitude, content yourself with a moderate virtue. Fervour is absolutely necessary for you, above all for the young Nuns, whom you have received since we left you. Among the old, particularly remember me to Mother N. of the Cross. I remember them all well, but I cannot name them in detail. Say, if you please, to Father du Fresne's sister, that I hope she will be fervent; otherwise our Lord might complain. I do not know whether I shall write to the good Mother Jane of the Angels, and to another who has written to me. I must take my time, and God must give me what to say. May He animate you with His Spirit, and raise your aims above this life, by a lively faith, and by the expectation of the coming of Jesus Christ, who will very shortly visit each one on his last day. Every other expectation, if it is not accompanied by this one, is but madness. The waiting for our Lord ought entirely to ravish our minds, and swallow up all our own little amusements and interests, which are but wretchedness. The thought of the other world should outweigh the memory of this, by raising us up to Jesus Christ.

In Him I am, &c.

LETTER CI.

To the same, and to all the Community.

He animates them to perfection, in consideration of the great favours, which their house had received from God.

March 24, 1658.

I saw in your last letter, of the 10th of this month, the secret disposition of your soul, my dear Mother, and I find nothing there which displeases me. The lost country, of which you speak to me, will be very useful to you, if you constantly persevere in wanting God only, and in interesting yourself only in His holy service. With regard to your dear Mothers and sisters, you oblige me to turn towards them the waters which were flowing elsewhere. It is not that I have forgotten them, but I wait in all things for the help of our Lord, which follows the determination of His providence. When I think of your whole Community, I observe two kinds of Nuns: some that are old with whom I am acquainted, the others younger, whom I do not know. As for the old, the great things that they have seen impose such an obligation upon them to bind themselves closely to God, that, if they are in a state of lukewarmness, their negligence is extremely blameable. If for twenty years they have not laboured to grow in grace and in fervour, they may expect that our Lord will

complain of them. Setting before them the many prodigies that He has wrought in their favour, the many singular tokens of His protection, and of His providence, that He has made them experience; and so many victories which His power has obtained over their enemies, He will say to them, either that they have not meditated upon and acknowledged these benefits, or that they have failed to correspond to them. That is incredible.

To come, then, to particulars, I think that our Lord wants you to live a life of grace, and not purely of nature; a life inward and recollected, not outward and bustling; a life of fervour and of vigilance for your advancement, not one of lukewarmness and of carelessness. To live a life of grace, is to examine the motives by which we act, and see whether they are embraced according to our natural inclination, or with a view to the greater service of God. The life of grace makes us oppose the propension of nature, and sustain ourselves by the consideration of God. *I like that Mother, because she is to my taste, and I will do whatever you please for her; for the others I have no attraction; I feel nothing for them, and I could bring myself to do but very little* on their account merely. Now, this way of speaking is according to the principles of nature. Grace regards the charity of God, which is universal, will have no other motive nor other attraction than the will of God, does not follow either the instincts nor the repugnances which proceed from natural affections or aversions; is not soured by the vexations it receives, always excuses its neighbour, forgets its own interests, willingly gives

up its particular inclinations, to adopt those of the generality. Grace inspires us only to love God, and cannot endure that we should love ourselves. To be interior is to walk in the presence of God, paying attention to the movements of the heart; it is to keep the whole economy of our soul and of its powers well regulated; it is to be exercised in the love of God, to have recourse to God in all things, not to make resolves from whims or tempers; it is to keep silence, to love retreat and recollection.

To have fervour for our advancement, is to labour to root out our vices, to deny ourselves in eating and drinking, in sleeping, and generally in all things; never to say we like this better than that. I have seen formerly that one liked one kind of meat, and seasoned in such and such a way, another liked some other kind. One liked the fat, another the lean, and each one spoke of her taste and her appetite. All this is mean and unworthy of a soul that has given herself to Jesus Christ. It is more important than we think to conquer self in things of this kind. When in the morning, we hear the bell ring for rising, to get up at once as if the bed were on fire, unless indisposed; to keep up a great regularity, to observe exactly the commands of obedience: this is to have ardour and vigilance for our spiritual progress. And it is thus we testify our gratitude to God for the benefits we have received from Him; otherwise we lead a wholly natural life, contenting ourselves with avoiding great evils, and only making small efforts for the service of God. I would rather never see our old Sisters of Loudun, than

to see them slothful and as little advanced as when our Lord began to establish His kingdom in them. All we have to do is to aim early at a high point of perfection, and to form in our mind an exalted plan of life.

With regard to the young Nuns who have come to you in the last twenty years, they are very wrong if they are not fervent. For the Mothers who received them having passed through such great experiences of the mercy of God, must have brought them up in Religion in a much more perfect manner than they themselves were brought up in it in their youth. That is why their daughters, having from the first been imbued with a good dye, should now be very much advanced, and very good. When I say good, I mean recollected, united to our Lord by prayer, and a continual meditation on His life and death; when I say good, I mean docile like children, obedient to their Superiors, and to all the officials who have any authority, as they would obey God Himself, if they saw Him in front of them. When I say good, I mean entirely mortified in their passions, their inclinations, and all their sentiments; accustomed to regulate all things by charity, to be sweet-mannered, and to wear down the flesh by austerities.

I cannot sufficiently say how much the children of God love chastising the body, and how useful it is for them so to do. It is the key of the treasures of God. If we do it with humility, to punish ourselves before God for our ordinary faults, we shall find that God is a Father full of kindness, who tenderly caresses His children, when

He sees that they chastise themselves, to satisfy His justice. A body that is often beaten by penances, frightens the devil; the mind becomes stronger and more vigorous by it, the heart more devout and more ardent. Delicate souls who content themselves with some slight strokes received from the hand of penance, and then rest themselves effeminately in their nest, which is slothfulness, cannot be thought fit for the intercourse of Angels. To receive the visits and caresses of heaven, we must either suffer much inwardly, or ill-treat our body outwardly. Happy is he who is in one or other of these exercises! God is accustomed, too, when He wishes to grant some signal grace to a soul, either to send her troubles within, or else to inspire her to ill-treat her body, and then He dispenses to her His munificence. Blessed art thou, O fervent soul, burning with the love of God and the desire of pleasing Him; thou fearest nothing either of heaven or hell with over much affright, because heaven is favourable to thee, and the powers of hell fly from before thee, and tremble at thy approach. Where are now the marvels of God? Where is the God of Israel? that God of goodness, who so gloriously manifested His power in succouring poor Sisters, weak, abandoned, and become, in their misery, the scorn of the world? After so many favours, must He be meanly served, my dear Sisters? I leave you to judge. I have only room left to tell you that I am, &c.

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